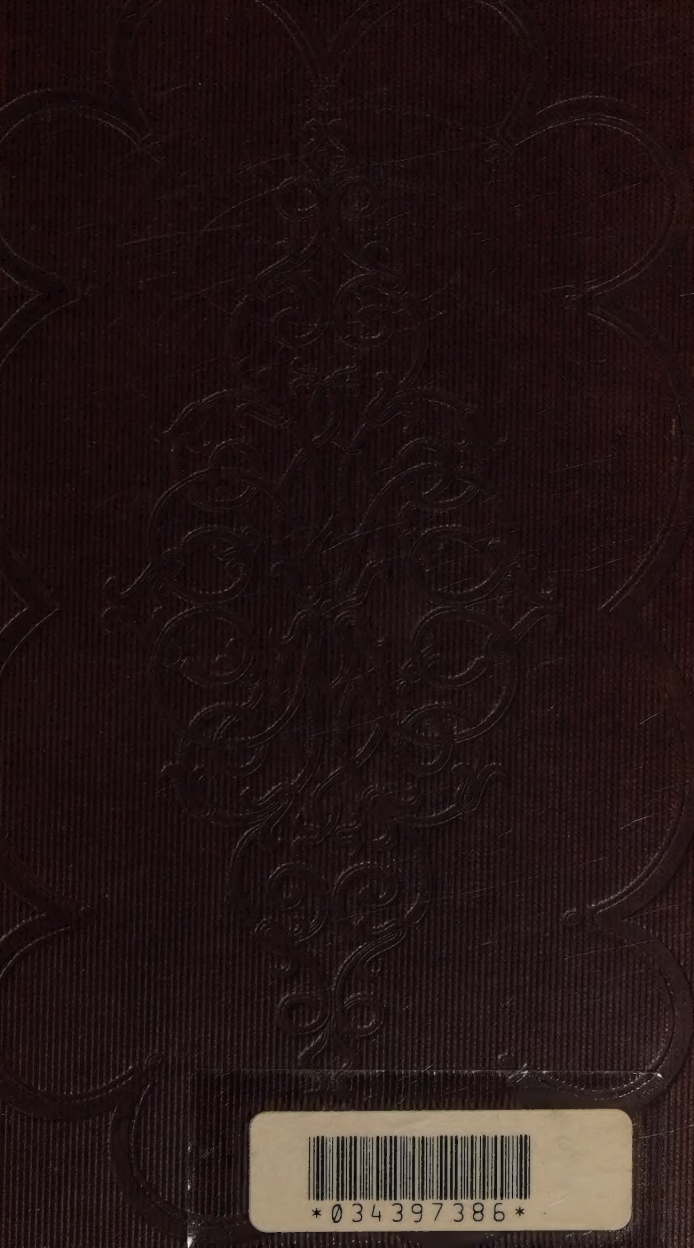
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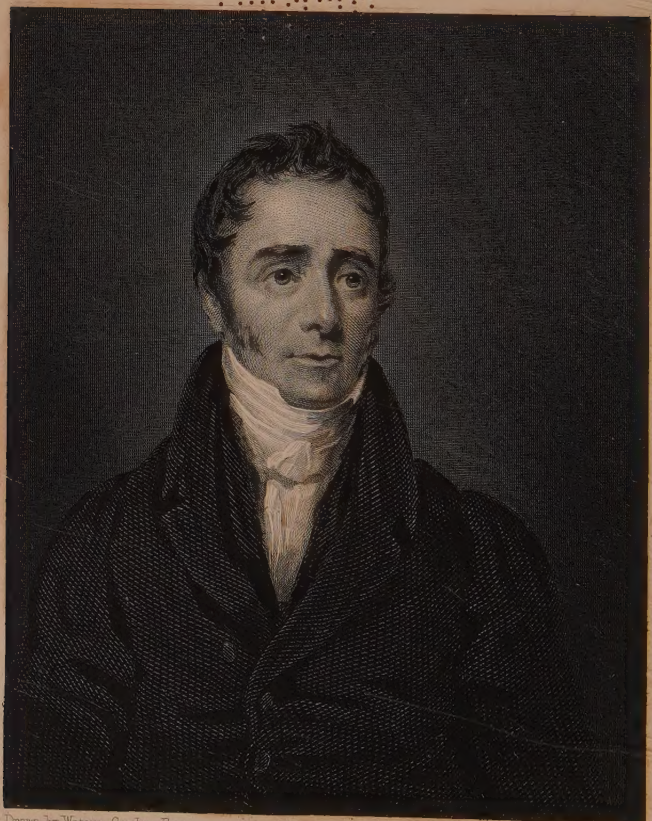

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THE

PROSE WORKS

OF

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

VOL. 17.

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The Seat of Lord Jeffrey.
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THE

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE WORKS

OF

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

VOL. XVII.

PERIODICAL CRITICISM.

VOL. I.

POETRY.

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BY

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

VOL. I.

POETRY.

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CONTENTS

OF VOLUME SEVENTEENTH.

		PAGE
ARTICLE	I.—ON ELLIS'S SPECIMENS OF THE EARLY ENGLISH POETS, ...	1
———	II.—ELLIS' AND RITSON'S SPECIMENS OF EARLY ENGLISH METRICAL ROMANCES,	16
———	III.—GODWIN'S LIFE OF CHAUCER, ...	55
———	IV.—TODD'S EDITION OF SPENSER, ...	80
———	V.—HERBERT'S POEMS, ...	102
———	VI.—EVANS' OLD BALLADS, ...	119
———	VII.—MOLIÈRE, ...	137
———	VIII.—CHATTERTON, ...	215
———	IX.—RELIQUES OF BURNS, ...	242
———	X.—CAMPBELL'S GERTRUDE OF WYOMING,...	267
———	XI.—THE BATTLES OF TALAVERA. A POEM,	291
———	XII.—SOUTHEY'S CURSE OF KEHAMA,.....	301
———	XIII.—CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE. CANTO IV.	337

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POETICAL CRITICISM.

ARTICLE I.

ON ELLIS'S SPECIMEN OF THE EARLY ENGLISH POETS. THIRD EDITION. 3 VOLS. 1803.

[GEORGE ELLIS, ESQ., *to whom the 5th Canto of Marmion is inscribed, was the coadjutor of* MESSRS CANNING *and* FRERE, *in the Anti-Jacobin, and the author of various separate works, distinguished by extensive antiquarian knowledge, and elegant critical taste. He died in* 1815, *at the age of* 70. *The following passages are from an Article in the Edinburgh Review for* 1804.]

IT is obvious to every one who has studied our language, whether in prose or poetry, that a luminous history of its rise and progress must necessarily involve more curious topics of discussion than a similar work upon any other European language. This opinion has not its source in national partiality, but is dictated by the very peculiar circumstances under which the English language was formed. The other European tongues, such at least as have been adapted to the purposes of literature, may be divided into two grand classes—those which are

derived from the Teutonic, and those which are formed upon the Latin. In the former class, we find the German, the Norse, the Swedish, the Danish, and the Low Dutch, all of which, in words and construction, are dialects of the Teutonic, and preserve the general character of their common source, although enriched and improved by terms of art or of science adopted from the learned languages, or from those of other kingdoms of civilized Europe. The second class comprehends the Italian, the Spanish, and the French in all its branches. It is true, the last of these has, in modern times, owing to the number of French writers in every class and upon every subject, departed farther from its original than the two others; but still the ground-work is the Latin; and the more nearly any specimen approaches to it, it may be safely concluded to be the more ancient; for, in truth, we know no other rule for ascertaining the antiquity of any particular piece in the *Romanz* language, than by its greater or slighter resemblance to the speech of the ancient Romans, from which it derives its name. Thus every language of civilized Europe is formed of a uniform pattern and texture, either upon the Teutonic, or upon the Latin. But the same chance which has peopled Britain with such a variety of tribes and nations, that we are at a loss to conceive how they should have met upon the same spot—and that, comparatively, a small one—has decreed that the language of Locke and of Shakspeare should claim no peculiar affinity to either of these grand sources of European speech; and that if, on the one hand, its conformation and

construction be founded on a dialect of the Teutonic, the greater number of its vocables should, on the other, be derived from the Romanz, or corrupted Latin of the Normans. It is interesting to observe how long these languages, uncongenial in themselves, and derived from sources widely different, continued to exist separately, and to be spoken respectively by the Anglo-Norman conquerors and the vanquished Anglo-Saxons. It is still more interesting to observe how, after having long flowed each in its separate channel, they at length united and formed a middle dialect, which, though employed at first for the mere purpose of convenience and mutual intercourse betwixt the two nations, at length superseded the individual speech of both, and became the apt record of poetry and of philosophy.

The history of poetry is intimately connected with that of language. Authors in the infancy of composition, like Pope in that of life, may be said to "lisp in numbers." History, religion, morality, whatever tends to agitate or to soothe the passions, is, during the earlier stages of society, celebrated in verse. This may be partly owing to the ease with which poetry is retained upon the memory, in those ruder ages, when written monuments, if they at all exist, are not calculated to promote general information; and it may be partly owing to that innate love of song, and sensibility to the charms of flowing numbers, which is distinguishable even among the most savage people. But, whatever be the cause, the effect is most certain; the early works of all nations have been written in verse, and

the history of their poetry is the history of the language itself. It therefore seems surprising, that, where the subject is interesting in a peculiar as well as in a general point of view, a distinct and connected history of our poetry, and of the language in which it is written, should so long have been a *desideratum* in English literature; and the wonder becomes greater when we recollect, that an attempt to supply the deficiency was long since made by a person who seemed to unite every quality necessary for the task.

The late Mr Warton, with a poetical enthusiasm which converted toil into pleasure, and gilded, to himself and his readers, the dreary subjects of antiquarian lore, and with a capacity of labour apparently inconsistent with his more brilliant powers, has produced a work of great size, and, partially speaking, of great interest, from the perusal of which we rise, our fancy delighted with beautiful imagery, and with the happy analysis of ancient tale and song, but certainly with very vague ideas of the history of English poetry. The error seems to lie in a total neglect of plan and system; for, delighted with every interesting topic which occurred, the historical poet pursued it to its utmost verge, without considering that these digressions, however beautiful and interesting in themselves, abstracted alike his own attention, and that of the reader, from the professed purpose of his book. Accordingly, Warton's *History of English Poetry* has remained, and will always remain, an immense commonplace-book of *memoirs to serve for such an history*. No antiquary can open it,

without drawing information from a mine which, though dark, is inexhaustible in its treasures; nor will he who reads merely for amusement ever shut it for lack of attaining his end; while both may probably regret the desultory excursions of an author, who wanted only system, and a more rigid attention to minute accuracy, to have perfected the great task he has left incomplete.

It is therefore with no little pleasure that we see a man of taste and talents advance to supply the deficiency in so interesting a branch of our learning,—a task to which Johnson was unequal, through ignorance of our poetical antiquities, and in which Warton failed, perhaps, because he was too deeply enamoured of them.

The elemental part of the English language, that from which it derives, not indeed the greater proportion of its words, but the rules of its grammar and construction, is the Anglo-Saxon; and Mr Ellis has dedicated his first chapter to make the English reader acquainted with it. The example of their poetry, which he has chosen to exhibit, is the famous war-song in praise of Athelstane's victory in the battle of Brunenburgh,—an engagement which checked for ever the victorious progress of the Picts and Scots, and limited their reign to the northern part of Britain. We cannot, from this poem, nor indeed from any other remnant of Anglo-Saxon poetry, determine what were the rules of their verse. Rhyme they had none; their rhythm seems to have been uncertain; and perhaps their whole poetry consisted in the adaptation of the words to some simple tune; al-

though Mr Ellis seems inclined to think, with Mr Tyrwhitt, that the verse of the Saxons was only distinguished from their prose by "a greater pomp of diction, and a more stately kind of march." To this specimen of Saxon poetry Mr Ellis has subjoined a translation of it into the English of the age of Chaucer, which we recommend to our readers as one of the best executed imitations that we have ever met with. It was written by a friend of Mr Ellis (Mr Frere, if we mistake not) while at Eton School.

"The Mercians fought I understond,
There was gamen of the hond." . . &c.
"In Dacie of that gaming
Mony wemen hir hondis wring.
The Normannes passed that rivere,
Mid hevy hart and sorry chere.
The brothers to Wessex yode,
Leving the crowen and the tode,
Hawkes, doggis and wolves, tho
Egles and mony other mo,
With the dede men for their mede,
On hir corses for to fede.
Sen the Saxonis first come
In schippes over the sea-fome,
Of the yeres that ben for gone
Greater bataile was never none," &c.

This appears to us an exquisite imitation of the antiquated English poetry; not depending on an accumulation of hard words, like the language of Rowley, which, in every thing else, is refined and harmonious poetry, nor upon an agglomeration of consonants in the orthography, the resource of later and more contemptible forgers, but upon the style itself, upon its alternate strength and weakness, now nervous and concise, now diffuse and

eked out by the feeble aid of expletives. In geneneral, imitators wish to write like ancient poets, without ceasing to use modern measure and phraseology; but, had the conscience of this author permitted him to palm these verses upon the public as an original production of the fourteenth century, we know no internal evidence by which the imposture could have been detected.

From considering the state of the Anglo-Saxon poetry at and previous to the Conquest, Mr Ellis turns his consideration to that of the invaders, and treats at considerable length of what may be called the Anglo-Norman literature. It is well known, that the monarchs who immediately succeeded the conqueror, adopted his policy in fostering the language and arts of Normandy, in opposition to those of the Anglo-Saxons, whom they oppressed, and by whom they were detested. The French poetry was not neglected; and it is now considered as an established point, that the most ancient metrical romances existing in that language were composed, not for the court of Paris, but for that of London; and hence a British story, the glories of King Arthur, became their favourite theme. The ingenious Abbé de la Rue wrote several essays, printed in the Archæologia, which throw great light upon the Anglo-Norman poets; and of this information Mr Ellis has judiciously availed himself. But he also discovers, by the explanations attached to his extracts from Wace, that intimate acquaintance with the Romanz language, which is at once so difficult to acquire, and so indispensable to the execution of his history.

In the third chapter, we see the last rays of Saxon literature, in a long extract from Layamon's translation of the *Brut* of Wace. But so little were the Saxon and Norman languages calculated to amalgamate, that though Layamon wrote in the reign of Henry II., his language is almost pure Saxon; and hence it is probable, that if the mixed language, now called English, at all existed, it was deemed as yet unfit for composition, and only used as a piebald jargon for carrying on the indispensable intercourse betwixt the Anglo-Saxons and Normans. In process of time, however, the dialect, so much despised, made its way into the service of the poets, and seems to have superseded the use of the Saxon, although the French, being the court language, continued to maintain its ground till a later period. Mr Ellis has traced this change with a heedful and discriminating eye, and has guided us through the harsh numbers of the romancers and the compilers of legends, and through the wide waste of prosaic verse, in which it was the pleasure of Robert of Gloucester and Robert de Brunne to record the history of their country, down to that period when English poetry began to assume a classical form, and to counterbalance, in the esteem even of the kings and nobles, the hitherto triumphant Anglo-Norman. This grand change was doubtless brought on by very slow degrees, and it is difficult exactly to ascertain its progress. The history of English Minstrelsy, in opposition to that of the Anglo-Normans, would probably throw great light on this subject; for these itinerant poets must have made use of the

English long before it was thought fit for higher purposes.

The epoch from which English may be considered as a classical language, may be fixed in the reign of Edward III., the age of Gower and of Chaucer, in which it was no longer confined to what the latter has called "the drafty riming" of the wandering minstrel, but employed in the composition of voluminous and serious productions, by men possessed of all the learning of the times.

It has been warmly disputed in what particular manner the father of English poetry contributed to its improvement. Mr Ellis, with great plausibility, ascribes this effect chiefly to the peculiar ornaments of his style, consisting in an affectation of splendour, and especially of Latinity, which is not be found in the simple strains of Robert of Gloucester, or any of the anterior poets, nor indeed in that of Laurence Minot, or others about his own time.

In chapter ninth, the language of Scotland, and the history of her early poetry, comes into consideration. This is a thorny point with every antiquary. The English and Scottish languages are in earlier times exactly similar; and yet, from the circumstances of the two countries, they must necessarily have had a separate origin. Mr Ellis seems disposed to adopt the solution of Mr Hume, who supposes the Saxon language to have been imposed upon the Scottish, by a series of successful invasions and conquests, of which history takes no notice. To this proposition, in a limited degree, we are inclined to subscribe; for there is no doubt that the Anglo-Saxons of Bernicia extended them-

selves, at least occasionally, as far as the frith of Forth, occupied the Merse and Lothian, introduced into them their language, and, when conquered by the Scots and Picts, were in fact the *Angli*, to whom, as subjects of the crown of Scotland, our King's charters were so frequently addressed. But we cannot admit these conquests to be supposed farther than they are proved; nor do we conceive that one province, though a rich one, could have imposed its language upon the other subjects of the Kings who acquired it by conquest. There must have been some other source from which the Scoto-Teutonic is derived, than the Anglo-Saxon spoken in Lothian. This grand source we conceive to have been the language of the ancient Picts; nor would it be easy to alter our opinion. Those who are connoisseurs in the Scottish dialects, as now spoken, will observe many instances of words in the idiom of Angus-shire (the seat of the Picts) which can only be referred to a Belgic root; whereas those of South-country idiom may almost universally be traced to the Anglo-Saxon. The Norman, from which, as Mr Ellis justly remarks, the Scottish dialect, as soon as we have a specimen of it, appears to have borrowed as much as the English, was probably introduced by the influx of Norman nobles, whom the oppression of their own kings drove into exile, or whom their native chivalrous and impatient temper urged to seek fortune and adventures in the court of Scotland. Having traced the origin of our language, the earlier Scottish poets, Barbour and Winton, pass in review, with specimens from each, very happily selected, to

illustrate at once their own powers of composition, and the manners of the age in which they wrote. These are intermingled with criticisms, in which the reader's attention is directed to what is most worthy of notice, and kept perpetually awake by the lively and happy style in which they are conveyed.

The merit of Occleve and Lydgate are next examined, who, with equal popularity, but with merit incalculably inferior, supported the renown of English poetry after the death of Chaucer. One specimen from the latter we cannot help extracting as irresistibly ludicrous.

" One of the most amusing passages in the Book of Troy relates to a well-known event in the life of Venus.

" The *smotry* * smith, this swarte Vulcanus, * *Smoky.*
That whilom in hearte was so jealous
Toward Venus that was his wedded wife,
Whereof there rose a deadly mortal strife,
When he with Mars gan her first espy,
Of high malice, and cruel false envy,
Through the shining of Phebus' beams bright,
Lying a-bed with Mars her owne knight.
For which in heart he brent as any glede,* * *A burning coal.*
Making the slander all abroad to sprede,
And gan thereon falsely for to muse.
" And God forbid that any man accuse
For so little any woman ever!
Where love is set, hard is to dissever!
For though they do such thing of gentleness,
Pass over lightly, and bear none heaviness,
Lest that thou be to woman odious!
And yet this smith, this false Vulcanus,
Albe that he had them thus espied,
Among Paynims yet was he defied
And, for that he so Falsely them awoke,
I have him set last of all my boke, [* *Mahometry,*
Among the goddes of false mawmentry," * &c. i. e. *idolatry.*

"Upon this occasion, the morals of our poetical monk are so very pliant, that it is difficult to suppose him quite free from personal motives which might have influenced his doctrine. Perhaps he had been incommoded by some intrusive husband, at a moment when he felt tired of celibacy, and wished to indulge in a temporary relaxation from the severity of monastic discipline."

From Lydgate our author proceeds to James I. of Scotland, upon whose personal qualities he pronounces a merited panegyric, accompanied with several extracts from the "Kingis Quair." The next chapter is peculiarly interesting. It contains a retrospect of the conclusions to be drawn from the information already conveyed; and this introduces a well-written and pleasing digression upon the private life of the English during the middle ages. We learn that, even in that early period, the life of the English farmer or yeoman was far superior in ease and comfort to that of persons of the same rank in France. Pierce Ploughman, a yeoman apparently, possessed a cow and calf, and a cart-mare for transporting manure; and although, at one time of the year, he fed upon cheese curds and oat cakes, yet after Lammas, when his harvest was got in, he could "dress his dinner to his own mind." We also learn, that the peasants were so far independent, as to exact great wages; and doubtless these circumstances, combined with the practice of archery, gave the English infantry such an infinite advantage over those of other nations, consisting of poor half-fed serfs, and gained them so many battles in spite of the high-souled chivalry of France, and the obstinate and enduring courage of our Scotish ancestors. Mr Ellis remarks, on this subject—"It is very honourable to the good

sense of the English nation, that our two best early poets have highly extolled this useful body of men, while the French minstrels of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, universally seem to approve the supercilious contempt with which the nobles affected to treat them. We have also much curious information concerning the dress of the period, particularly of the ladies, who in the day-time seem to have been wrapt up in furs, and in the night-time to have slept without shifts. The serenades, the amusements, the food, the fashions, the manners of the period, are all illustrated by quotations from the authors who have referred to them ; and, with the singular advantage of never losing sight of his main subject, Mr Ellis has brought together much information on collateral points of interest and curiosity, which will be new to the modern reader, and pleasing to the antiquary, by placing, at once, under his review, circumstances dispersed through many a weary page of black letter.

The reign of Henry VI., and those of the succeeding monarchs, down to Henry VIII., seem to have produced few poets worthy of notice. Two translators of some eminence occur during the former period, and the latter is graced by Harding (a kind of Robert of Glocester *redivivus*) ; Hawes, a bad imitator of Lydgate, ten times more tedious than his original ; the Ladie Juliana Berners, who wrote a book upon hunting in execrable poetry ; and a few other rhymers, who, excepting perhaps Lord Rivers, are hardly worth naming. During this period, however, the poetry of Scotland was in

the highest state of perfection; and Mr Ellis finds ample room, both for his critical and historical talents, in celebrating Henry the Minstrel, Henrysoun, Johnstoun, Mercer, Dunbar, and Gawain Douglas. Upon the works of the two last, Mr Ellis dwells with pleasure; and his opinion may have some effect in refreshing their faded laurels. In the reign of Henry VIII., the Scottish bards continue to preserve their superiority; for, surely, the ribald Skelton, and the tiresome John Heywood, cannot be compared to Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, or to the anonymous author of the Mourning Maiden.

We have already taken notice of the very extensive range of discussion which this sketch embraces. It was therefore almost unavoidable, that there should remain subjects on which we might have wished for farther information. The history of English Minstrelsy, in particular, makes too important a part of Mr Ellis's subject, for us to permit him to escape from it so slightly. As he has announced his intention to publish a second series of specimens, selected from the early metrical romances, we recommend strongly to him, to prefix such a prefatory memoir as may fill up this wide blank in the history of our language. We are the more earnest in this recommendation, because we know from experience that Mr Ellis will manage, with the temper becoming a gentleman, a dispute which, though the circumstance seems to us altogether astonishing, has certainly had a prodigious effect in exciting the irritable passions of our antiquaries, and has been managed with a degree of acrimony only surpassed by the famous

and rancorous quarrel about the Scots and Picts. We observe with pleasure, that, in repelling some attacks upon his first and second editions, Mr Ellis has uniformly used the lance of *courtesy*, as a romancer would have said; and truly we have no pleasure in seeing his contemporaries spur their hobby-horses headlong against each other, and fight at *outrance*, and with *fer emoulu*. Mr Ellis's style is uniformly chaste and simple, diversified by a very happy gaiety which enlivens even the most unpromising parts of his subject. We have only to add, that no author has passed over his own pretensions with such unaffected modesty, or given more liberal praise to the labours of others.

From the works of voluminous authors Mr Ellis has selected such passages as might give the best general idea of their manner; but he has also been indefatigable in seeking out all such beautiful smaller pieces as used to form the little collections, called, in the quaint language of the times, Garlands. His own work may be considered as a new garland of withered roses. The list concludes with the reign of Charles II. The publication seems to have been made with the strictest attention to accuracy, except that, throughout the whole, the spelling is reduced to the modern standard, for which, we fear, Mr Ellis may undergo the censure of the more rigid antiquaries. For our part, as all the antique words are carefully retained and accurately interpreted, we do not think that, in a popular work, intelligibility should be sacrificed to the preservation of a rude and uncertain orthography.

ARTICLE II.

ON ELLIS'S SPECIMENS OF EARLY ENGLISH METRICAL ROMANCES. 3 VOLS. 1805. AND ANCIENT ENGLISH METRICAL ROMANCES, SELECTED BY JOSEPH RITSON. 3 VOLS. 1802.

[JOSEPH RITSON, *the ingenious but whimsical and crabbed Antiquarian, died at Hoxton, 23d Sept.* 1803. *The article in which* SIR W. SCOTT *compared the Metrical Romances edited by him, and* MR GEORGE ELLIS, *appeared in the Edinburgh Review for* 1806.]

THE history, the laws, and even the religion of barbarous nations, are usually expressed in verse. Whether poetry is preferred for the sake of the facility with which it may be committed to memory where written records are unknown, or whether the solemnity of these subjects is supposed to require a mode of expression the most distant from that of common life, would be difficult to discover, and superfluous to enquire. But it is sufficiently obvious, that what is preserved only by recitation, must soon be altered and corrupted, enlarged or compressed, so as may best suit the powers of the reciter's memory, or most readily arrest the attention of those whom he wishes to please by the re-

petition. Thus, in the course of a few generations, the religious poem becomes a mythological fable, and the history degenerates into incredible romance. Still, however, the poetry of an early age continues to be interesting to the moderns, even when entirely perverted from the purposes to which it was originally applied. The bard may have changed his subject from the facts occurring in his own period, or that of his father's, to the feats of foreign or imaginary heroes: but his work will not the less continue to reflect the manners of the time in which he composed. A Gothic poet, like a Gothic painter, discards all attention to local costume, and pourtrays his characters, his manners, his scenery, according to the characters, manners, and scenery of his own age. It is therefore no matter whether the scene be laid in Greece or in Taprobana; the description, however unlike what it is intended to represent, will always present a very just picture of the manners of France and England in the feudal times. Accordingly, since the attention of our antiquaries has been turned towards the metrical romances of England and Normandy, we have gained more insight into the domestic habits, language, and character of our ancestors during the dark, warlike, and romantic period of the middle ages, than Leland and Hearne were able to attain from all the dull and dreary monastic annals, which their industry collected, and their patience perused. In fact, to form a just idea of our ancient history, we cannot help thinking that these works of fancy should be read along with the labours of the professed historian. The

one teaches what our ancestors thought; how they lived; upon what motives they acted, and what language they spoke; and having attained this intimate knowledge of their sentiments, manners, and habits, we are certainly better prepared to learn from the other the actual particulars of their annals. From the romance, we learn what they were; from the history, what they did; and were we to be deprived of one of these two kinds of information, it might well be made a question, which is most useful or interesting? In this point of view, we entirely lay aside the consideration which the metrical romances often claim as works of fancy, presenting to the imagination a pleasing detail of romantic adventure, and graced occasionally by poetical flights of considerable merit. With such ideas of the importance of these ancient legends of chivalry, we are bound to express our gratitude to those by whose labours they have been drawn from the dusty and chaotic confusion of public libraries, and presented to the public in a legible and attainable shape.

Bishop Percy, the venerable editor of the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, was, we believe, the first who turned the public attention upon these forgotten hordes of antiquarian treasure, by an Essay upon Metrical Romance, prefixed to the third volume of his work, in which the merits and qualities of the poetry of chivalry are critically investigated, and a list given of such metrical romances as had come to the reverend editor's knowledge, to which we are now in a capacity to make large additions. Warton followed Bishop Percy in his taste for the

ancient romance, of which he was an indefatigable student. Whenever he has occasion to mention a tale of chivalry, in his *History of Poetry*, it seems to operate like a spell, and he feels it impossible to proceed with the more immediate subject of his disquisition, until he has paced through the whole enchanted maze, and introduced his reader into all its labyrinths. Of the great variety of strange and anomalous digressions, with which that work abounds, and which, separately considered, possess infinite merit and curiosity, a large proportion arose solely from his attachment to this romantic lore. But although the curiosity of the public was in some degree excited by the references of these ingenious and inquisitive authors to the poetry of other times, it was not easy to procure for it adequate gratification. The ancient metrical romances were very early superseded by prose works upon the same subjects. These last, although far inferior, in interest and merit, to the poetical tales which preceded them, claimed and obtained a superior degree of credit, founded upon the fiction alleged to be inseparable from metre; upon the degraded state of the minstrels, whose province it was to recite these disparaged rhyming legends; and, above all, upon a grave pretext set up by the author of each prose work, that he had translated it *verbatim et literatim* from an ancient Greek or Latin original. As no such Greek or Latin original for a romance of chivalry has ever been produced, we may be safely allowed to doubt whether any such ever existed. But our ancestors received these accounts with unhesitating credulity, and

gravely read the voluminous romances of Lancelot du Lac, and Palmerin of England, as translations from ancient annals, while they rejected with scorn the rhyming legends of the minstrels on the same subjects. Thus the metrical romances were obliged to give way to the prose works, which were, in fact, borrowed from them; and so complete was the substitution of the one species of fable for the other, that the press, which was then invented about the period of this revolution in public taste, groaned under the splendid folios of the former, while the latter remained in obscure manuscripts, or were only printed in the meanest manner and for the meanest of the people. Thus the very existence of the metrical romance, as a distinct, separate, and more ancient kind of composition, was unknown and unnoticed till the publication of the works which we have mentioned. Even long after that period, printed editions being as rare as manuscripts, remained very little disturbed by those who possessed them, and absolutely inaccessible to every other person. At length, as the taste for old ballads began to awaken that for romantic fiction, Pinkerton and others reprinted in their miscellanies some of the shorter and more ancient of our metrical tales of chivalry; and others were republished singly both in London and Edinburgh. But the first comprehensive and general work, upon this interesting subject, was undertaken by the late Mr Ritson. No one could, in some respects, have been more admirably qualified for the task. Although it is now three years since this publication appeared,

yet the subject is so intimately and immediately connected with the more popular and elegant work of Mr Ellis, that, in reviewing the one, we think it a duty we owe to the public to take some notice of the other, and at least point out to their attention the undeserved neglect into which it has fallen.

This collection contains twelve metrical romances of chivalry, selected by the editor as those which, from a general acquaintance with such compositions, he deemed most worthy of publication. There is prefixed a long and elaborate dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy; and learned notes are subjoined to the collection, with a glossary of obsolete words.

In the important task of arranging and correcting the text of these poems, it is impossible to bestow too much praise upon the editor. To an industry incapable of fatigue, and a fidelity which defied every power of temptation, the late Mr Ritson united acute abilities and an intimate acquaintance with every collateral source from which light could be thrown upon his subject. In possessing, therefore, a collection so important to our ancient literature, we have the satisfaction to know, that the poems published are most strictly and literally genuine, and that they are ably and clearly illustrated in the corresponding notes.

The first romance in the collection is Ywain and Gawain, a most beautiful tale of chivalry, from which Warton has given copious extracts in his History of English Poetry. It is certainly the finest romance in the work, perhaps the most interesting which now exists. It is of French origin, being

written, or at least greatly enlarged, by the famous Chretien de Troye, who flourished in the twelfth century. We cannot resist giving a very short summary of the story. Guenever, the wife of the famous Arthur, hearing, upon a time, the knights who guarded her chamber-door, telling to each other their exploits of chivalry, suddenly issues from her apartment, and commands Sir Colgrevance, who was then speaking, to continue his narration. The knight unwillingly obeys, and tells a long and marvellous adventure which had befallen him beside an enchanted well, where he had been finally discomfited by a puissant knight, the guardian of the fountain, the wonders of which are described in strong Gothic painting. Sir Ywain resolves to undertake the adventure, and, having set forth in disguise, slays in single fight the champion of the fountain, upon the threshold of his own castle gate. But the victor, enclosed in the court by the fall of the portcullis, is in the utmost danger from the followers of the slain warrior. He is rescued at length by means of Lunet, a damsel belonging to the castle, who conceals him in a chamber. Here he obtains a sight of the widow of the knight of the fountain, and falls desperately in love. His passion is at length successful, through the intervention of the damsel, who very sensibly reminds her lady, that the conqueror must needs more than make up the loss of the vanquished. Sir Ywain marries the dame, with whom he lives in great happiness, until he obtains her permission to visit the court of Arthur, pledging his knightly word to return within the year. But Sir Ywain forgot his promise, a

circumstance which did not prevent his becoming distracted for the loss of his lady, when reminded of his breach of faith by a damsel whom she despatched to the court of Arthur, to renounce her husband, and proclaim him *dishonoured and truthless*. He is restored to his senses by a sage lady, whose enemies he discomfits by his prowess, and then resumes his profession of knight-errantry. While wandering in quest of adventures, he observes a lion combating a dragon, and goes to his assistance, both because the lion was the more noble animal, and on account of the ancient and irreconcilable feud betwixt knights-errant and dragons. The dragon being slain, the grateful lion attaches himself to his ally, and maintains a great part in all his future adventures. They come to the enchanted fountain, where Ywain unexpectedly meets with Lunet, the damsel to whom he had formerly been so much indebted. She is bound to find a champion against a certain day, to fight with her mistress's false steward, who had accused her of treason. Their meeting under circumstances of mutual distress, is very happily described by the old minstrel. Sir Ywain promises to appear and defend her upon the appointed day. In the mean while, he is involved in a variety of adventures, from many of which he is extricated by the lion; so that the time is nearly past when he appears to combat the steward. Lunet is restored to life and liberty, and by her subsequent address, Sir Ywain is reconciled with his lady.

> "And so Sir Ywaine and his wife
> In joy and bliss they led their life;
> So did Lunet and the lioun;
> Untill that death have driven them doun."

The next romance, called Launfal, though a beautiful fairy tale, might have been as well omitted, as it is published by Mr Ellis in the notes to Way's translation of Le Grand's *Fabliaux*. We hope it was not inserted with the peevish purpose of pointing out supposed errors in Mr Ellis's edition, although we observe some explanations of the difficult passages, given with a "*not as Mister Ellis says;*" and that in cases where the justice of the correction is as uncertain as the dispute is insignificant. The second volume contains Sir Libius Disconius, *i. e.* Le Beau Decogneu (of which Bishop Percy has given an elegant *précis* in his Essay on Metrical Romance); Hornchild, the King of Tars; Emare, and a metrical Chronicle of England. The third volume contains Florence of Rome, the Earl of Tholouse, the Squire of Low Degree, and the Knight of Courtesy and Lady of Faguell. We believe that both the Chronicle of England, and the beautiful fairy tale of Sir Orpheo, might have been greatly enlarged by recourse to the Auchinleck MS. in the Advocates' Library of Edinburgh, to which Mr Ritson seems to have had ready access. Upon the whole, the romances are judiciously selected, and we have already praised the well-known accuracy of the editor.

We cannot confer the same unmixed praise on the introductory Essay on Romance and Minstrelsy. We were, on the contrary, about to bestow our very strongest and most decided reprobation upon the acrimonious spirit of vindictive controversy in which it is written, when we were in some degree disarmed by the avowal, that it was composed under the pressure of "continued ill

health and low spirits;" and by the recollection, that the scene has been long since closed by the hand of death. But we must not, in our respect for the dead, altogether forget what is due to the living. Much coarse and insolent invective is poured on Bishop Percy, who seems to have incurred the editor's resentment in a double capacity, —as a dignitary of the church, and a successful publisher of ancient poetry. We do not think Mr Ritson imbibed this spirit from the works which he studied. Surely, neither the gallant Sir Lancelot, nor the courteous Sir Gawain, would have given a reverend Bishop the lie direct, on account of a disputed reading in the old song of Maggie Lauder! We would have antiquaries remember, that the ridicule which their pursuits are at all times apt to incur, becomes pointed in proportion to the indecent vehemence of their argument. Whether the controverted line (which refers to the dwelling of a certain bagpiper) ought to be read, "Come ye *frae* the border," or "Live you *upo'* the border," or, finally, "*Ye* live *upon* the border," might surely have been debated, if, indeed, it was worth debating (*num pugna est de paupere regno*), with the temper and manners of a gentleman. The frequent charge brought by Mr Ritson against the editor of the Reliques of Ancient Poetry, of adulterating, by modern improvements, the ancient poems which he published, appears to us to be urged with far too much grossness. We do not, indeed, approve of this species of sophistication, by which the man of taste is sometimes a gainer at the

expense of the antiquary. But when we consider, that the Reliques were published at a time when the public taste was far from encouraging the pursuits of the mere antiquary, we wonder not that the learned editor should have been tempted to render his ancient poetry more attractive by his own elegant interpolations. And we apprehend, that as few modern publishers possess the taste and judgment of Bishop Percy, so, even those as highly gifted, want, in the present day, the apology which we have pleaded for the editor of the Reliques.

In the general scope of Mr Ritson's essay, we discover much both of the defects and merits which characterise his lucubrations. The accumulation of materials bears witness to the undeviating and incessant labour of an antiquary zealously employed on a favourite topic. A number of curious facts are drawn together respecting the romances of all nations, but especially concerning those of England. The first part of the Essay treats of the origin of romances; and the author is particularly anxious to combat the system which deduces those fictions from the north of Europe. He produces some plausible arguments to prove that many of the Scandinavian romances were borrowed or translated from the French, and that the Edda of Sturleson has no claim to high antiquity. The author's ardour in controversy has, however, sometimes hurried him too far. Thus he informs us, when giving the history of Odin of Scandinavia, that this famous personage "attempts to kiss Rinda, daughter to the King of the Ruthes, and receives a slap on the face. According to Torfæus, he even ravished this young

lady; but the passage, upon looking into Saxo, to whom he seems to refer, could not be found." (Essay, p. xxxi.) Now, we have looked into Saxo, and found the passage at great length in the Paris edition of 1514, folio xxv. In several other instances, the authority of Saxo seems to countenance the mythology of the Edda, much more than Mr Ritson is disposed to admit. No positive opinion is given, in the Essay, upon the origin of romance, although the theories of former writers are combated with apparent success from an intimate acquaintance with authorities of the middle ages. Indeed, we have been long of opinion, that Mr Ritson was, both by talent and disposition, better qualified to assail the opinions of others, than to deduce from the facts which he produces a separate theory of his own.

In the second part of the Essay, English romance is treated of; and the author contends, with great ardour, for the superior antiquity of the French works upon that subject. Indeed, this is not surprising, when it is considered that French was not merely the court and law language of England, but was spoken universally by the nobles and gentry, from the Conquest, down to the reign of Edward III.

The third part of the Essay treats of the English minstrels, a race of men against whom Mr Ritson seems to have entertained a special malice, and whom he anxiously blends with the jugglers, whose tricks of legerdemain formed another branch of our ancestors' amusement. Now, although it is extremely probable that the same person might occasionally

practise both arts, yet, in themselves, they were separate and distinct professions. Nor do we agree with Mr Ritson, in supposing that the minstrels, whose profession was music and the recitation of poetry, were not frequently themselves poets. Their daily bread depended upon their stock of tales and songs; and it must have been as natural for them to have composed the romances which they sung, as for a modern musician to compose the pieces which he performs. Above all, we cannot see why the arts of composition, which are admitted to have been exercised by the minstrels of France, should be supposed unattainable by those of England. Subsequent to the reign of Edward III., most of the popular French romances were translated into English, which then became the language, as well of the nobles as of the vulgar. Why the minstrels, who were most interested in these translations, should be deemed unequal to the task of accomplishing them, we can see no good reason for believing. A wandering and idle race of men, attendant on the barons who went to war in France, they had time to acquire both languages; and the art of rhyming must have been easy to persons who almost every day of their lives were employed in poetical recitation. Minstrels and bards are often employed as synonymous terms, although the poetic powers of the bards are indisputable. As late as the reign of Queen Elizabeth, this combination occurs in the poem of a Scottish satirist describing London.

> "Bot yet the *menstrallis and the bairdis*,
> Thair trowand to obtain rewardis,

About his ludgene loudlie played."
Legend of the Bischop of St Androis.

A proof how far the task of the poet and of the reciter were required from the minstrel, occurs in a very ancient poem, of which there is one MS. in the British Museum, and another in the library of Peterborough cathedral. It contains the history of an intrigue betwixt Thomas of Erceldoune, called the Rhymer, and the Queen of Fairies, by whom, as every one knows, he was transported to the "Londe of Faeri," and gifted with those supernatural powers of poetry and prophecy, by which he was afterwards distinguished. The following dialogue passes betwixt the bard and his faery leman upon this memorable occasion.

" 'Fare wel, Thomas, I wend my way,
I may no longer stande with the.'—
'Gif me sum tokyn, Lady gaye,
That I may say I spake with the.'—

" 'To harp and carpe, Thomas, wher so ever ze gon,
Thomas, take the these with the.'—
'*Harping,' he said, 'ken I non,*
For tong is chefe of mynstralcie.'—

" 'If thu wil spelle, or talys telle,
Thomas thu shall never make lye;
Wher so ever thu goo, to fryth or felle,
I pray thu speke never non ille of me.' "

From this decisive declaration, which a poet and minstrel made on the nature of his own profession, it appears plainly, that, in more ancient times, the minstrel's principal and most honourable occupation referred to poetry, rather than music; and the Rhymer might have been justly described as one

" who united the arts of poetry and music, and sung verses to the harp, of his own composing." if he had not disdained the musical skill to which it was Mr Ritson's persuasion that the talents of the minstrel were exclusively limited. We should have been anxious to have heard what reply his keen and eager spirit could have suggested; but poor Ritson is now probably deciphering the characters upon the collar of Cerberus, or conversing in unbaptized language with the Saxon and British chiefs of former times;

" With Oswald,
Vortigern, Harold, Hengist, Horsa, Knute,
Allured, Edgar and Cunobeline."

Upon the whole, it occurs to us, from a careful perusal of his Essay, that Mr Ritson's talents were better adapted to research than to deduction, to attack than to defence, to criticism than to composition; and that he has left us a monument of profound industry and extensive study, undirected by any attempt at system, and tarnished by the splenetic peculiarities of an irritable temperament. Still let it be remembered to his honour, that, without the encouragement of private patronage, or of public applause; without hopes of gain, and under the certainty of severe critical censure, he has brought forward such a work on national antiquities, as in other countries has been thought worthy of the labour of universities, and the countenance of princes.

The work of Mr Ellis is of a nature adapted for general circulation, and for conveying a lively and pleasing picture of the contents of the ancient

metrical romances, without literal transcription of their whole contents. With this view, the editor has analyzed each romance in prose, introducing, at the same time, occasionally, as a continuation of the narrative, such parts of the original as seemed to possess either peculiarities of expression or poetical beauty, sufficient to render their preservation desirable, as fair or favourable specimens of the whole composition. In transcribing these selected passages, Mr Ellis has discarded the antique orthography, preserving, however, carefully, every ancient word, while he reduces the spelling to the modern standard, according to the mode adopted in his previous publication, entitled, "Specimens of Ancient English Poetry."

Such is the plan of the present work. It is obvious, that by adopting it, Mr Ellis voluntarily resigned the object of Mr Ritson's publication, who gave his romances entire to the world; a mode more acceptable, doubtless, to the antiquary, though infinitely less interesting and amusing to the general reader, as well as to the editor. We have no doubt that some more severe student of our national antiquities may censure the liberties which Mr Ellis has taken with his materials, and deprecate his scouring the shield of ancient chivalry. But, with great reverence for such grave judges, we presume to think, that the shield may be safely scoured, where there is no danger of its being proved, in the process of purification, to be no antique buckler, but a barber's bason, or a paltry old sconce. This is far from being the case in the present instance. The burnishing of the armour

has only tended to ascertain the valuable materials of which it is sometimes composed, and which were heretofore obscured by cobwebs and rust. So far are we from thinking that the popular labours of Mr Ellis will supersede a complete edition of these curious legends, that, we doubt not, the wit and elegance with which he has abridged and analyzed their contents, will encourage many a gentle reader to attempt the originals, who would before have as soon thought of wearing the dress, as of studying the poems of his ancestors. Socrates is said to have brought philosophy from heaven to reside among men; and Addison claimed the merit of introducing her to the tea-tables of the ladies. Mr Ellis, in his turn, has brought the minstrels of old into the *boudoirs* and drawing-rooms, which have replaced the sounding halls and tapestried bowers in which they were once familiar; so that the age of chivalry, instead of being at an end for ever, may perhaps be on the point of revival. In this point of view, much is gained, and nothing lost by the plan of Mr Ellis. Those whom an abridgement cannot satisfy, may consult the originals with more convenience and facility, from a previous knowledge of their contents, and of the libraries where they exist, while curiosity is excited in others who would never otherwise have thought on the subject. This general interest may perhaps end in a complete edition of all that old bards

> "In sage and solemn times have sung,
> Of turneys and of trophies hung;
> Of forests, and enchantments drear,
> Where more is meant than meets the ear."

To the Romances, Mr Ellis has prefixed an introduction, which contains a more plain and comprehensive view of the rise and progress of the minstrels and their poetry, than we ever remember to have met with. As the subject is curious, we will endeavour to give the reader a short statement of their history, with such remarks as occur to us.

Normandy appears to have been the cradle of minstrelsy. The Northmen who wrested that province from the feeble successors of Charlemagne, had, doubtless, like all other barbarous people, especially the Scandinavian tribes, their national poets, under the name of scalds, or by whatever other term they were distinguished. On their settling in Neustria, their native speech speedily melted down into the more commodious and extended language used by the inhabitants of Northern France, which was called *Romance*, being, in fact, a corrupted Latin, introduced by the Romans into their Gallic province. In this language, the minstrels composed most of their works, until, from that circumstance, the word romance, from signifying the early Norman French, came at length to mean those chivalrous tales usually composed in that tongue. Of the authors of these compositions, Mr Ellis has given us the following concise, but excellent account.

"The following may perhaps be accepted as a tolerable summary of the history of the minstrels. It appears likely that they were carried by Rollo into France, where they probably introduced a certain number of their native traditions; those, for instance, relating to Ogier le Danois, and other northern heroes, who were afterwards enlisted into the tales of chivalry;

but that, being deprived of the mythology of their original religion, and cramped perhaps, as well by the sober spirit of Christianity, as by the imperfection of a language whose tameness was utterly inapplicable to the sublime obscurity of their native poetry, they were obliged to adopt various modes of amusing, and to unite the talents of the mimic and the juggler, as a compensation for the defects of the musician and poet. Their musical skill, however, if we may judge from the number of their instruments, of which very formidable catalogues are to be found in every description of a royal festival, may not have been contemptible; and their poetry, even though confined to short compositions, was not likely to be void of interest to their hearers, while employed on the topics of flattery or satire. Their rewards were certainly, in some cases, enormous, and prove the esteem in which they were held; though this may be partly ascribed to the general thirst after amusement, and the difficulty experienced by the great in dissipating the tediousness of life; so that the gift of three parishes in Gloucestershire, assigned by William the Conqueror for the support of his *joculator*, may perhaps be a less accurate measure of the minstrel's accomplishments, than of the monarch's power and of the insipidity of his court.

"To the talents already enumerated, the minstrels added, soon after the birth of French literature, the important occupation of the *diseur* or *declaimer*. Perhaps the declamation of metrical compositions might have required, during their first state of imperfection, some kind of chant, and even the assistance of some musical instruments, to supply the deficiencies of the measure; perhaps the aids of gesture and pantomime may have been necessary to relieve the monotony of a long recitation; but at all events it is evident, that an author who wrote for the public at large, during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, was not less dependent for his success on the minstrels, than a modern writer of tragedy or comedy on the players of the present day. A copyist might multiply manuscripts for the supply of convent-libraries! but while ecclesiastics alone were able to read, there was no access to the ears of a military nobility, without the intervention of a body of men who travelled in every direction, and who were every where welcomed as the promoters of mirth and conviviality.

"The next step was easy. Being compelled to a frequent exercise of their talent in extemporaneous compositions, the minstrels were probably, like the *improvisatori* of Italy, at least equal, if not superior, to more learned writers, in the merely

mechanical parts of poetry; they were also better judges of the public taste. By the progress of translation they became the depositaries of nearly all the knowledge of the age, which was committed to their memory: it was natural, therefore, that they should form a variety of new combinations from the numerous materials in their possession; and it will be shown hereafter, that many of our most popular romances were most probably brought by their efforts to the state in which we now see them. This was the most splendid era of their history, and seems to have comprehended the latter part of the twelfth, and perhaps the whole of the thirteenth century. After that time, from the general progress of instruction, the number of readers began to increase; and the metrical romances were insensibly supplanted by romances in prose, whose monotony neither required nor could derive much assistance from the art of declamation. The visits of the minstrels had been only periodical, and generally confined to the great festivals of the year; but the resources, such as they were, of the ponderous prose legend were always accessible. Thus began the decline of a body of men, whose complete degradation seems to have been the subsequent result of their own vices. During the period of their success they had most impudently abused the credulity of the public; but it is a whimsical fact, that the same fables which were discredited while in verse, were again, on their transfusion into prose, received without suspicion. It should seem that falsehood is generally safe from detection, when concealed under a sufficient cloak of dulness."—Ellis, i. p. 19–23.

By attending to this history, we may easily solve the difficulty which Ritson found in reconciling the degraded state of the minstrels to the high rewards and countenance which they sometimes received, even in preference to those of the clerical profession. It appears, on one occasion, that two mendicant friars, soliciting hospitality at the gate of a convent, were received with acclamation under the idea of their being minstrels, and kicked out again when they announced their real character. It is also proved, we believe, that one minstrel received four shillings for his performance, and six priests

only sixpence at the same festival.[1] But such instances of extravagant reward to individuals of a class which dedicates personal exertions to public amusement, are consistent with the general disrespect to which this body in general is condemned. Individual instances excepted, the player and the musician of modern days, the genuine successors of the minstrels, incur a certain degree of contempt from their situation, which they are too often driven to merit. It is somewhat hard that, as society advances in civilisation, and as demands are made on this class of men for refinement and improvement in their respective arts, their seclusion from the society where that refinement is to be acquired, becomes proportionally more rigid and strict. We cannot stop to appreciate the moral causes of the fastidious harshness with which society requites those on whom it depends for its most exquisite amusements.

Having shortly traced the history of the minstrels, Mr Ellis proceeds to examine the progress of their compositions. Of these, as we have already hinted, the first seem to have been unadorned annals or histories, reduced to measure for the convenience of the reciter, who was to retain them upon his memory. This field, however, soon became too barren and uninteresting. Other sources of narration were sought for. Some occurred in the ancient songs of the scalds, the legitimate pro-

[1] This is no doubt quite consistent with modern manners, as may appear, by considering, whether Young Roscius or a Welsh curate is best paid, and to which the gates of an episcopal palace would fly most speedily open.

ductions of the minstrels. Others, of Arabian origin, found their way to France through Spain. But a much more numerous class was derived from the tales of the Armoricans, the neighbours of the Normans, who derived themselves from a Welsh colony. From this source, the minstrels probably drew their first accounts of

> "What resounds
> In fable or romance, of Uther's son,
> Begirt with British and Armoric knights."

This theme, however, acquired its chief popularity after the acquisition of England by William the Conqueror. It is now completely proved, that the earliest and best French romances were composed for the meridian of the English court, where that language continued to be exclusively used, at least till the time of Edward III. When the Norman race of monarchs had once secured themselves on the throne of England, and identified the honour of that country with their own, they began to feel an interest in its early history, and to listen with applause to the feats of its heroes. The legends of the Welsh, on these occasions, were much more acceptable than those of the Saxons. The latter were the people whom the Normans had conquered, and whose kings they had dispossessed; the praise, therefore, of their departed heroes revived sentiments of discord, better forgotten by all parties. But the exploits of the British were carried back to so ancient a period, and so intermingled with Celtic fable, that they recalled no sentiments of ancient independence, and suggested no ideas dangerous to the Norman race.

The exploits of Arthur were therefore unanimously adopted, as the subject of tales and romances without end; and these were drawn by the Norman minstrels from the British traditions flowing from Wales, and floating in what had lately been the British kingdom of Cumberland; but especially from the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Mr Ellis gives us an abridgement of that author's Chronicle of Britain, and his *Vita Merlini*, a poem in Latin verse. This last work only exists in MS., which is much to be regretted, as, from very frequent reference to particulars of British story, it affords demonstrable evidence, that Geoffrey did not, as has been repeatedly affirmed, himself forge the incidents of his Chronicle, but really drew them from the Armorican Chronicle, put into his hands by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. The whole tissue of fables, therefore, concerning Arthur, which compose the most striking part of Geoffrey's history, and indeed the history itself, seem, in the words of our author, to be less a sudden fabrication, the work of any one man's invention, than "a superstructure gradually and progressively raised on the foundation of the history attributed to Nennius," the purity of which, by the way, had been already sullied by the Monk Samuel. Mr Ellis next proceeds to show that the state of Wales, during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, was favourable to an exchange of literary materials betwixt the bards of that country and the Norman minstrels, as well as between the former and their brethren of Armorica.

"But as there is reason to believe that the British lays were

seldom if ever committed to writing, it might be expected that different minstrels would tell the same story with some variations; that, unable to retain in their memory the whole of a long narrative, they would carry off, in the first instance, detached adventures, which they would afterwards connect as well as they were able; and that a system of traditional history, thus imperfectly preserved through the medium of a very loose translation, and already involved in much geographical and chronological confusion, would assume the fabulous appearance which we find in the French narratives called romances."—Vol. i. p. 117.

To conclude his account of the materials from whence English romance was drawn, the editor observes, that although we owe to the Norman minstrels the greater part of the romances now extant, which were avowedly translated into English, as soon as that language came to supersede the French; yet a small number were most probably originally composed in English for the use of the Scottish court, where French was never exclusively spoken, and afterwards imitated or translated by French minstrels. On this subject he gives an elegant summary of the system proposed by the editor of Sir Tristrem, which we had occasion to consider in our review of that volume.[1] Upon this hypothesis, it is curious to observe, that as the earliest French romances were written in England, so the earliest English romances were composed in Scotland.

We heartily wish Mr Ellis had continued his dissertation on the materials of our metrical romance to a later period, as we have not seen a more clear and comprehensive view of the subject, so far as it goes. This desideratum is, however, in

[1] [In the *Edinburgh Review*, vol. iv.—The criticism referred towas written by Mr Ellis.]

part supplied by the arrangement of his romances into classes, with the general preliminary remarks upon each class. The Appendix to the Introduction contains an account of Petrus Alphonsus *de clericali disciplina*, by Mr Douce, an industrious and ingenious antiquary; and, secondly, a translation by Mr Ellis of the Breton lais of Marie, twelve in number, exhibiting much of that genius for romantic fiction, which has been always an attribute of the Celtic tribes. We would willingly extract one of them for our readers' amusement; but are obliged to hasten to the metrical romances, which are the principal object of the collection.

The first class comprehends romances relating to King Arthur. These, as we have already seen, are probably the earliest in order, and although once most popular and numerous, are now become, in their metrical shape, exceedingly rare; because their very popularity rendered them the first objects of imitation to the prose authors, whose works superseded those of the minstrels. One romance of formidable length has been still preserved in MS., and forms the first article of Mr Ellis's work. It is called Merlin and Arthur, and resumes the account of these worthies, from their birth to the marriage of Arthur, when the transcriber of one fragment resigned his task, after having copied 10,000 lines. This is a romance in the very best style of minstrelsy, so far as language, and even incident, are concerned. The marvellous birth of Merlin, surreptitiously begotten by a fiend upon a maiden, under the most extraordinary circumstances, is one of those feats of witchery which arrest the imagination. The mother is condemned

to death by a rigid law of the British against such as infringed the rules of chastity. But Blaise, a holy hermit, by christening the child at the instant of its birth, baffles the hopes of the devil, who had expected, by means of engendering with a virgin, to create a semi-demon, who should be devoted to the powers of evil.

"The good man then returned with his infernal proselyte, and restored him by means of the basket to the midwife; who, carrying him to the fire, and surveying his rough hide with horror and astonishment, could not refrain from reproaching him for his unreasonable choice of a mother who had never taken the usual means to have a child.

"'Alas,' she said, 'art thou Merlin?
Whether * art thou? and of what kin? * *Whence.*
Who was thy father, by night or day,
That no man wite ne may?
It is great ruth, thou foul thing,
That for thy love (by Heaven's King!)
Thy mother shall be slain with woe!
Alas that *staund* * it shall fall so! * *Time.*
I would thou were far in the sea,
With that thy mother might scape free!'
When that he heard her speak so,
He *brayed* * up his eyen two, * *Raised suddenly—with a start.*
And *lodly* * on her gan look, * *Loathingly.*
And his head on her he shook,
And gan to cry with loud din;
'Thou lyest!' he said, 'old quean!
My mother shall no man *quell*,* * *Kill.*
For no thing that man may tell,
While that I may stand or gon!
Maugré hem every one
I shall save her life for this.
That thou shalt hear and see, ywis.'" Vol. i. p. 213, 214.

We have no time to stop to trace the completion of this promise, nor the rest of Arthur's history, which Mr Ellis has taken from a poetical account of his achievements and death, occurring

in the Museum. The downfall of the chivalry of the Round Table was completed by the death of Sir Lancelot, its most redoubted supporter. Mr Ellis transcribes from the Morte Arthur the following eulogium over that hero, which may be said to comprehend the cardinal virtues of a *preux* chevalier.

"And now I dare say—that, Sir Lancelot, ther thou lyest, thou were never matched of none earthly knight's hands. And thou were the curteist knight that ever bare shielde. And thou were the truest freende to thy lover that ever bestrode horse. And thou were the truest lover, of a synful man, that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever stroke with swerde. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came amonge prece (press) of knyghtes. And thou were the meekest man and the gentillest that ever eate in hal among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortall foe that ever put spere in the rest!"—Vol. i. p. 386, 387.

The next class comprehends what Mr Ellis has ventured to call Saxon Romances; that is, romances referring to Saxon subjects, and claiming, perhaps, some foundation in the history of that people. Horn-Child, which bears the most decided marks of Saxon origin, is omitted, as already published by Mr Ritson, in an entire state; but we could have wished Mr Ellis had extended his criticism to that poem, or favoured us with some general remarks upon the romance of the Anglo-Saxons. Guy of Warwick, and Bevis of Hamptoun, occupy this station entirely. The first is a very long romance, and in general as dull as may be, with even more than the usual huge proportion of battles and tournaments. Yet it may be read with pleasure in Mr Ellis's abridgement, though the original would have defied the patience of most antiquaries. The

combat betwixt Guy and Colbrond the Danish champion, is told in a more animated strain, and in a different stanza. We suspect that this is the only part of the romance which has any claim to a Saxon origin, and that all the rest has been added by some minstrel after the crusades. Mr Ellis seems disposed to identify the redoubted Sir Guy with Egils a Norwegian pirate, who assisted Athelstan at the battle of Brunnanburgh. The Egils-saga, which contains an account of that chief's adventures, affords no countenance to this conjecture, which we incline to consider as fanciful. Bevis of Hamptoun resembles Guy of Warwick, but is of a far ruder and apparently more ancient manufacture. There is a harshness and barbarous tinge about this poem, which bespeaks its being composed in a very rude state of society, or for the amusement of the lower ranks; two points which it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish. Notwithstanding their demerits, Guy of Warwick, and Bevis of Hamptoun, equalled, or excelled in popularity, almost all the romances of the middle ages.

The next is entitled an Anglo-Norman Romance, and contains the adventures of no less a person than Richard Cœur de Lion. It has, for many reasons, great claims on our attention. In the first place, it tends to show the progress from metrical history to metrical romance; for, in its more ancient and simple state, as a fragment still exists in the Auchinleck Manuscript, it appears to have contained little more than an historical detail, not much exaggerated, of the actual transactions of Richard in the Holy Land. But the inventions of succeed-

ing minstrels have grafted upon the original narrative a number of extraordinary and supernatural events of the wildest and most romantic kind, in order to render it more astonishing or interesting to their hearers. There is, in particular, a minute account of a marriage betwixt Henry II. and an unknown Princess, by whom he had three children, namely, Richard, John, and a daughter unknown to our genealogists, called Topyas. This queen of England being a fiend, or something very little better, was unable to be present at any of the sacraments; and being once compelled to remain till the elevation of the host took place, she made an elopement through the roof of the chapel, carrying with her Topyas and John. The latter fell from the air, and broke his thigh bone; the mother escaped with the former, and was never more seen. The legend thus engrafted upon the English history, is taken from an event said to have happened to Count Fulk of Anjou, often alluded to by our Scottish historians as a proof, that, by one side of the house, the kings of England were descended from the devil. Perhaps, however, the minstrel hinted a satire at Eleanor of Guienne, who was, in fact, a sort of devil incarnate. Of this fiendish parentage, according to the romance, came that

> "King y-christened of most renown,
> Strong Richard Cœur de Lioun."

The feat by which he gained this well-known appellation is supposed to have happened during his confinement in the Austrian dominions, where he slew the Emperor's son by a box on the ear.

The Emperor having scruples to accomplish his revenge, by dipping his hands in the royal blood of his prisoner, contented himself with introducing into Richard's company a hungry lion, under the conviction that he was guiltless of all consequences which might ensue from their meeting. Richard, who had armed his hand with a few ells of handkerchiefs, the gift of a loving princess, plunged it down the throat of the monster, tore out his heart, devoured it before the face of the Emperor, and thus acquired an ample title to the name by which he is known in history. Amid this wild farrago, there occurs a minute incident of truth, which has escaped our historians. It seems pretty clear that Richard, while travelling in disguise through Austria, amused himself with dressing his own dinner, with some assistance from Sir Foulk Doyley and Sir Thomas Multon (the ancestors of the Dacres of Dacre). While these three warriors were busied in roasting a goose, they were teazed by an intrusive female minstrel, whom they rudely dismissed, without allowing her to share their good cheer. In consequence, she betrayed them to the Duke of Austria. This strange anecdote is alluded to by Petrus d'Elrilo, a writer of the twelfth century, and by Otho de Saint Blaise, who maintains, that Richard himself turned the spit, forgetful that he wore a ring which announced the rank of the wearer to be far superior to his occupation. So strangely are truth and falsehood woven together in this curious performance. But this romance is also valuable, as a curious example of the change for the worse which the religious wars introduced

into the European character. In the earlier romances, the heroes are no doubt sufficiently savage; they shed much blood in battle, and are determined enemies to giants and wizards. But the cause of these military exertions is generally one with which we can sympathize; the deliverance of a fair lady, the righting of a wrong done to the helpless, or the supporting the tottering throne of a lawful monarch. A certain generosity is also mingled in their valour; and they are generally as ready to forgive and spare the vanquished, as to quell the vaunting and resisting enemy. But the crusader discarded from his bosom all that was amiable and mild in the spirit of chivalry. He fought for the cause of God against unchristened heathen hounds, and had neither authority nor inclination to forgive their wrongs to Heaven, as he might have pardoned those offered to himself. This romance contains a lively detail of the bloody cruelties practised by the champions of Palestine upon an enemy. The following extraordinary specimen of what crusaders were supposed capable of performing, although totally fabulous, shows the idea which the minstrels conceived of such a character, when carried to the highest and most laudable degree of perfection:—

"The best leeches in the camp were unable to effect the cure of Richard's ague; but the prayers of the army were more successful. He became convalescent; and the first symptom of his recovery was a violent longing for pork. But pork was not likely to be plentiful in a country whose inhabitants had an abhorrence for swine's flesh.

"An old knight, with Richard biding,
When he heard of that tiding,

That the kingis wants were swyche,
To the steward he spake privyliche.
'Our lord the king sore is sick, I wis,
After pork he alonged is;
Ye may none find to selle:
No man be hardy him so to telle!
If he did, he might die.
Now behoves to done as I shall say,
That he wete nought of that.
Takes a Saracen young and fat;
In haste let the thief be slain,
Opened, and his skin off flayn;
And sodden, full hastily,
With powder, and with spicery,
And with saffron of good coloùr.
When the king feels thereof savoùr,
Out of ague if he be went,
He shall have thereto good talènt.
When he has a good taste,
And eaten well a good repast,
And supped of the *brewis** a sup, * *Broth.*
Slept after, and swet a drop,
Thorough Goddis help, and my counsail,
Soon he shall be fresh and hail.'
The sooth to say, at wordes few,
Slain and sodden was the heathen shrew.
Before the king it was forth brought:
Quod his men, 'Lord, we have pork sought;
Eates and suppes of the brewis *soote*,* * *Sweet.*
Thorough grace of God it shall be your boot.'
Before king Richard carff a knight.
He ate faster than he carve might.
The king ate the flesh, and *gnew** the bones, * *Gnawed.*
And drank well after for the nonce.
And when he had eaten enough,
His folk hem turned away, and *lough.** * *Laughed.*
He lay still, and drew in his arm;
His chamberlain him wrapped warm.
He lay and slept, and swet a stound,
And became whole and sound.
King Richard clad him, and arose,
And walked abouten in the close."—Vol. ii. p. 225–227.

Shortly after this horrible banquet, the Christian

camp is attacked. Richard flies to repulse the invaders, succeeds, and returns, wearied with slaughter, to his tent.

"A knight his arms gan unlace;
Him to comfort and solace,
Him was brought a sop in wine.
'The head of that ilke swine,
That I of ate! (the cook he bade)
For feeble I am, and faint and mad.'
Quod the cook, 'That head I ne have.'
Then said the king, 'So God me save,
But I see the head of that swine,
For sooth, thou shalt lessen thine!'
The cook saw none other might be;
He fet the head, and let him see."
"The *swarte vis* * when the king seeth, *Black face.
His black beard, and white teeth,
How his lippes grinned wide,
'What devil is this?' the king cried,
And gan to laugh as he were wode.
'What? is Saracen's flesh thus good?
For hunger ere I be wo,
I and my folk shall eat mo.'"—Vol. ii. p. 228, 229.

Soon after this incident, Saladin despatches an embassy to Richard to solicit the ransom of the garrison of Acres, including several persons of high rank, who, with the city, had fallen into the hands of the Christians. Richard receives the ambassadors courteously, and requests their company to dinner.

"The invitation was gratefully accepted. Richard in the mean time gave secret orders to his marshal that he should repair to the prison, select a certain number of the most distinguished captives, and, after carefully noting their names on a roll of parchment, cause their heads to be instantly struck off; that these heads should be delivered to the cook, with instructions to clear away the hair, and, after boiling them in a caldron, to distribute them on several platters, one to each guest, ob-

serving to fasten on the forehead of each the piece of parchment expressing the name and family of the victim.

"This horrible order was punctually executed. At noon the guests were summoned to wash by the music of the waits; the king took his seat, attended by the principal officers of his court, at the high table, and the rest of the company were marshalled at a long table below him. On the cloth were placed portions of salt at the usual distances, but neither bread, wine, nor water. The ambassadors, rather surprised at this omission, but still free from apprehension, awaited in silence the arrival of the dinner, which was announced by the sound of pipes, trumpets, and tabours; and beheld, with horror and dismay, the unnatural banquet introduced by the steward and his officers. Yet their sentiments of disgust and abhorrence. and even their fears, were for a time suspended by their curiosity. Their eyes were fixed on the king, who, without the slightest change of countenance, swallowed the morsels as fast as they could be supplied by the knight who carved them.

"Their attention was then involuntary fixed on the smoking heads before them; they traced in the swoln and distorted features the resemblance of a friend or near relation; and received from the fatal scroll which accompanied each dish the sad assurance, that this resemblance was not imaginary. They sat in torpid silence, anticipating their own fate in that of their countrymen; while their ferocious entertainer, with fury in his eyes, but with courtesy on his lips, insulted them by frequent invitations to merriment. At length this first course was removed, and its place supplied by venison, cranes, and other dainties, accompanied by the richest wines. The king then apologized to them for what had passed, which he attributed to his ignorance of their taste; and assured them of his religious respect for their character as ambassadors, and of his readiness to grant them a safe conduct for their return. This boon was all that they now wished to claim; and

> "King Richard spake to an old man,
> 'Wendes home to your soudan!
> Say him, it shall him nought avail,
> Though he for-bar us our vitail,
> Bread, wine, fish, flesh, salmon, and conger;
> Of us none shall die with hunger,
> King Richard shall warrant,
> There is no flesh so nourissant
> Unto an English man,

Partridge, plover, heron, ne swan,
Cow ne ox, sheep ne swine,
As the head of a Sarezyn.
There he is fat, and thereto tender;
And my men be lean and slender.' "
Vol. ii. p. 232-6.

The other exploits of King Richard in the Holy Land were in a similar taste with this cannibal entertainment; and we are of opinion, that when such feats are imputed by way of praise and merit to the hero of the crusaders, and received, as doubtless they were, with no small applause by the audience, the fact will go a great way to ascertain, whether the European character was improved or debased by these Eastern expeditions.

The next class of Romances comprehend such as relate to Charlemagne and his Paladins. These are founded on the chronicle of the Pseudo-Turpin, a collection of fables not very dissimilar to those brought together by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and which, like his chronicle, has become the source of innumerable romances. But they never seem to have been equally popular in England; nor, indeed, could it be expected, as the scene is usually laid in France, Spain, or Italy. The Italians, from the days of Pulci to those of Ariosto, and much later, have had very many poems founded on this basis. The romances which Mr Ellis has given under this class are three,—Roland and Ferragus, Sir Otuel, and Sir Ferumbras.

The next romance is of Oriental origin, being the earliest edition of the Seven Wise Masters, long known among the school-boys of this country. It is followed by ten miscellaneous romances:—Flo-

rice and Blancheflour; Robert of Cysille; Sir Isumbras; Sir Triamour; Ipomydon; Eglamour of Artois; Layle Fraine; Sir Eger and Sir Grahame; Roswal and Lillian; and Amys and Amylion;—all tales of doughty knights and ladies fair, once in high renown among the courtly and the gallant, but now condemned to an obscurity which, in some respects, is as undeserved as their original supereminent reputation.

It would far exceed our limits, upon which we have already somewhat trespassed, to give a complete character of the ancient metrical romances. Their importance, in a historical point of view, we have already noticed. They hold out to us, like Shakspeare's players, the abstract and brief chronicles of the time, and demand the serious consideration of every historian. Even in a literary point of view, their merit is not contemptible. It is true, the story is generally rambling and desultory, utterly incapable consequently of exciting the pleasure arising from a well-conducted plan, all the parts of which depend upon each other, and tend, each in due degree, to bring on the catastrophe. So far is this from being the case, that, in a long romance, the adventures usually are all separated and insulated; only connected with each other, by their having happened to the same hero; just as a necklace of beads is combined by the thread on which they are strung. This arrangement, in fact, best suited the reciters, whose narration was to be proportioned to the time and patience of their audience; and whom this loose structure of story permitted to use freedom of compression or dilata-

tion as best suited their purpose, since any single adventure might be inserted without impropriety, or left out without being missed. The same cause accounts for the loose and often tedious style in which the minstrels indulged. It was of consequence that their stanza should be so simple, as to be easily recollected, and their diction so copious, as not to suffer by any occasional deficiency of memory. For these reasons, Robert de Brunne tells us, that the common minstrels were unable to repeat tales written in a concise style and complicated stanza, and that such became *nought* in their imperfect recitation. To these faults, we have often to add those of extreme awkwardness of contrivance and improbability of incident; but which neither offended the taste, nor shocked the faith of our plain and hardy ancestors. On the other hand, there is a sort of *keeping* in these ancient tales, which did not depend upon the minstrel's inclination, and from which he could not have departed, if he had a mind to do so. This arises from his painting the manners of his own time as they passed before his eyes, and thus giving a truth and unity to the chivalrous events he relates, which the modern labourers in the vineyard of romance are utterly unable to imitate. With all the pains these last can use to deck their champions in the antique taste, they are perpetually confounding the past time with the present, and are guilty of anachronisms almost as gross as his who introduced a tea-table scene into the history of John of Gaunt. Neither is the language in which these legends are told altogether unworthy of our applause. There

often occur passages, which, from the spirit of the poet rising with the situation, may justly claim a rank among the higher and more masculine orders of poetry. And although, as we have already noticed, the general conduct of the story is desultory and slightly put together, yet many of the individual adventures, of which each long romance is composed, are happily conceived and artfully executed. The gloom of superstition likewise added a wild and dismal effect to the wonders of the minstrel; and occasionally his description of supernatural events amounts nearly to sublimity.

To these ancient monuments of the past ages, Mr Ellis has rendered the same good service in English, which the Count de Tressan performed in France, by the *Corps d'Extraits de Romans de Chevalerie*. In some respects, the works resemble each other considerably. They are both executed by men of rank and fashion, who formed their style not merely by perusing the best authors, but by frequenting the first company in their respective countries. Both display an acute sense of the ludicrous, and can readily enliven, by a witty turn or lively expression, the dull or absurd details which they are occasionally obliged to narrate. We question, however, whether this is not sometimes too much indulged by both authors, since such license, when frequently taken, is rather irreverent, and looks as if the jest were levelled at once against the reader, the editor, and the original minstrel. In other respects, Mr Ellis has a decided superiority over Mons. de Tressan. He is infinitely more faithful as an editor; and, as an author, exhibits

much deeper research; which appears from his having chosen the metrical romances for his subject: whereas the count has confined his attention to those in prose, though far less ancient, and in every respect less interesting. But Mr Ellis's introduction sufficiently illustrates his superior skill as an antiquary, although he has brought forward fewer materials than Mr Ritson, and makes no parade of those which he has acquired: it is evidently because he wished to be an architect, not a mere collector of stones and rubbish. Every thing which he quotes is adapted to fill a place in his system; and thus he avoids the great error of antiquaries, who are too much busied with insulated facts, to present to their readers a connected historical view of the subject under discussion.

Notwithstanding this ingenious and lively publication, we still desire even the more to see a genuine edition of these ancient poems. It is painful to reflect, that they, with many unedited chronicles, the materials of our national history, are lying unhonoured and unconsulted amid the rubbish of large libraries.

ARTICLE III.

GODWIN'S LIFE OF CHAUCER.

[*From the Edinburgh Review for* 1804. *On the Life of* GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *the early English Poet; including Memoirs of his near Friend and Kinsman,* JOHN OF GAUNT, *Duke of Lancaster; with Sketches of the Manners, Opinions, Arts, and Literature of England in the* 14*th century. By* WILLIAM GODWIN. 2 *vols.* 4*to. London,* 1803.]

THE perusal of this title excited no small surprise in our critical fraternity. The authenticated passages of Chaucer's life may be comprised in half a dozen pages; and behold two voluminous quartos! The more sanguine of our number anticipated the recovery of the "Boke of the Lioun," and the other long lost labours of Adam Scrivenere, the bard's amanuensis; the more cautious predicted a new edition of the Chest of Rowley, and the Shakspeare cabinet of Ireland. Our expectations were yet farther heightened, by the lofty tone in which Mr Godwin contrasts his own labours and discoveries with those of the former biographers of Chaucer. Tyrwhitt, the learned and indefatigable editor of the Canterbury Tales, had professed him-

self unable to produce more than a short abstract of the historical passages of the poet's life; and Ellis, the elegant historian of our early poetry, has (to use his own words) "followed Tyrwhitt, in reciting a few genuine anecdotes, instead of attempting to work them into a connected narrative, in which much must have been supplied by mere conjecture, or by a forced interpretation of the allusions scattered through the works of the poet." But Mr Godwin censures this resolution, as having been adopted to save the fatigue of minute research after the documents from which a full and formal life of Chaucer might have been compiled.

"The fact is, however, that Tyrwhitt made no exertions as to the history of the poet, but contented himself with examining what other biographers had related, and adding a few memorandums, taken from Rymer's Manuscript Collections, now in the British Museum. He has not, in a single instance, resorted to the national repositories in which our records are preserved. In this *sort of* labour I had been indefatigable, and I have many obligations to acknowledge to the politeness and liberality of the persons to whose custody these monuments are confided. I encountered, indeed, no obstacle, whenever I had occasion to direct my enquiries among the different offices of Government. After all my diligence, however, I am by no means confident that I may not have left some particulars to be gleaned by the compilers who shall come after me."—Preface, p. xii.

After this heavy imputation upon a former editor, to whose industry and labours Chaucer is chiefly indebted for the revival of his fame; after the grave self-congratulation of the biographer; his thanks to those who aided, or did not impede his researches; and his modest apprehensions that, notwithstanding all his diligence, some gleanings may remain for future compilers;—the reader will

learn with admiration that Mr William Godwin's two quarto volumes contain hardly the vestige of an authenticated fact concerning Chaucer, which is not to be found in the eight pages of Messrs Thomas Tyrwhytt and George Ellis. The researches into the records have only produced one or two writs, addressed to Chaucer, while clerk of the works; the several grants and passports granted to him by Edward III. and Richard II., which had been referred to by former biographers; together with the poet's evidence in a court of chivalry, a contract about a house, and a solitary receipt for half a year's salary. These, with a few documents referring to John of Gaunt, make the Appendix to the book, and are the only original materials brought to light by the labours of the author. Our readers must be curious to know how, out of such slender materials, Mr Godwin has contrived to rear such an immense fabric. For this purpose he has had recourse to two fruitful expedients. In the first place, when the name of a town, of a person, or of a science, happens to occur in his narrative, he stops short, to give the history of the city *ab urbe condita;* the life of the man, from his cradle upwards, with a brief account of his ancestors; or a full essay upon the laws and principles of the science, with a sketch of the lives of its most eminent professors. We will not do Mr Godwin the injustice to suppose, that this mode of biography is copied from some respectable old gentleman prosing by his fireside, who halts in the story about Tom, till he has given the yawning audience the exploits and genealogy of honest Dick. We believe

he profited by instructions derived from no less a person than Miguel Cervantes.

"If you have occasion," says that author, "to mention a giant in your piece, be sure to bring in Goliah, and on this very Goliah (who will not cost you one farthing) you may spin out a swinging annotation. You may say, *The Giant Goliah, or Goliat*, was a Philistine, whom David the shepherd slew with the thundering stroke of a pebble, in the valley of Terebinthus. *Vide* Kings, such a chapter and such a verse, where you may find it written. If not satisfied with this, you would appear a great humanist, and would show your knowledge in geography, take some occasion to draw the river Tagus into your discourse, out of which you may fish a most notable remark: *The river Tagus*, say you, *was so called from a certain king of Spain. It takes its rise from such a place, and buries its waters in the ocean, kissing first the walls of the famous city of Lisbon; and some are of opinion that the sands are gold*," &c. &c. &c.

So well has Mr Godwin profited by these instructions, that the incidents of Chaucer's life, serving as a sort of thread upon which to string his multifarious digressions, bear the same proportion to the book that the alphabet does to the Encyclopedia, or the texts of a volume of sermons to the sermons themselves. A short glance at the work will fully justify this assertion.

Chaucer was born in London.—This is the subject of the first chapter. The commentary is a sketch of the history of London from the year of Christ 50, down to the reign of Edward III., with notices respecting the principal citizens and Lords Mayor, Henry Picard, John Philpot, Sir William Walworth; not forgetting Whittington and his cat. The proportion of the commentary to the text is as twelve pages to as many lines.—Chaucer must have gone to school.—This is text the second, and forms a sufficient apology for a long essay on the

learning of the age; while the probability that, during the vacation, Chaucer must have read romances,[1] introduces a long dissertation on these compositions, awkwardly abridged from Warton and Ellis. But Chaucer must have gone sometimes to church,—and therefore Mr Godwin feels himself obliged to give an account of the peculiar tenets of the Church of Rome; some of which, particularly those of purgatory and auricular confession, seem greatly to the taste of our philosophical biographer. The author proceeds, with the most unfeeling prolixity, to give a minute detail of the civil and common law, of the feudal institutions, of the architecture of churches and castles, of sculpture and painting, of minstrels, of players, of parish clerks, &c. &c.; while poor Chaucer, like Tristram Shandy, can hardly be said to be fairly born, although his life has attained the size of half a volume. How these various dissertations are executed, is another consideration; but we at present confine ourselves to the propriety of introducing them as part of the life of Chaucer. We are aware that Mr Godwin has informed us, that, "to delineate the state of England, such as Chaucer saw it, in every point of view in which it can be delineated, is the subject of this book;" and that "the person of Chaucer may in this view be considered as the central piece in a miscellaneous painting, giving unity and individual application to the otherwise disjointed particulars with which the canvass is

[1] Mr Godwin may have himself read Valentine and Orson, while at school; but during the 13th century, romances were the amusement of grown gentlemen.

diversified." Now, had the biographer either possessed, from the labours of others, or recovered, by his own industry, facts sufficient to make a regular and connected history of Chaucer, bearing some proportion to the "disjointed particulars" so miscellaneously piled together, we could have objected less to the digressive matter, although even then we might have required it to be abridged and condensed. But where the central figure, from which the whole piece takes its name and character, is dimly discoverable in the background, obscured and overshadowed by the motley groupe of abbeys, castles, colleges, and halls, fantastically portrayed around it, we cannot perceive either unity or individuality in so whimsical a performance. The work may be a view of the manners of the 13th century, containing right good information, not much the worse for the wear; but has no more title to be called a life of Chaucer, than a life of Petrarch.

We have said that Mr Godwin had two modes of wire-drawing and prolonging his narrative. The first is, as we have seen, by hooking in the description and history of every thing that existed upon the earth at the same time with Chaucer. In this kind of composition, we usually lose sight entirely of the proposed subject of Mr Godwin's lucubrations, travelling to Rome or Palestine with as little remorse as if poor Chaucer had never been mentioned in the title-page. The second mode is considerably more ingenious, and consists in making old Geoffrey accompany the author upon these frisking excursions. For example, Mr Godwin

has a fancy to describe a judicial trial. Nothing can be more easily introduced; for Chaucer certainly studied at the Temple,[1] and is supposed to have been bred to the bar.

"It may be amusing to the fancy of a reader of Chaucer's works, to represent to himself the young poet accoutred in the robes of a lawyer, examining a witness, fixing upon him the keenness of his eye, addressing himself with anxiety and expectation to a jury, or exercising the subtlety of his wit and judgment in the developement of one of those quirks by which a client was to be rescued from the rigour of strict and unfavouring justice. *Perhaps* Chaucer, in the course of his legal life, saved a thief from the gallows, and gave him a new chance of becoming a decent and useful member of society: *perhaps*, by his penetration, he discerned and demonstrated that innocence which, to a less able pleader, would never have been evident, and which a less able pleader would never have succeeded in restoring triumphant to its place in the community, and its fair fame. *Perhaps* Chaucer pleaded before Tresilian and Brember, and lived to know that those men whose fiat had silenced his argument, or to whose inferiority of understanding, *it may be*, he was obliged to vail his honoured head, were led to the basest species of execution, amidst the shouts of a brutish and ignorant multitude."—Vol. i. p. 369.

This curious *tirade* is not to be placed among those occasional flourishes to which authors who affect the striking and the sentimental are so peculiarly addicted. It is not given as a day-dream, in which the writer gives reins to the vivacity of his imagination; but the supposed cases which Mr Godwin puts, without the least authority from the record, are gravely intended as illustrations of the

[1] ["Mr Thynne declares 'it most certaine to be gathered by cyrcumstances of recordes, that the lawyers *were not of the Temple* till the latter parte of the reygne of Edw. III., at which time Chaucer was a grave manne, holden in greate credyt. and employed in embassye.'"—CAMPBELL—*Specimens of the British Poets*, vol. ii. p. 4.]

Life of Chaucer. For example, the next sentence informs us—"We have a right, however, to conclude, from his early quitting the profession, that he did not love it;" and this averment is followed with a list of the unhappy effects which the study of the law produces on the human understanding and temper. We do not think the profession congenial to the feelings of a youthful poet; but it is probable, that he who could stoop to the drudgery of comptroller of the customs, had other reasons for leaving the bar than mere disgust at the profession; for "cockets and dockets," and "sugar-casks, and beer-butts, and common-council men" (p. 502), may be supposed to have as benumbing an effect upon the heart and imagination, as cases and precedents, and the ambidexter ingenuity of the bar. Another instance of the laudable manner in which the narrative is bolstered out by imaginary circumstances, occurs where Mr Godwin treats of Chaucer's confinement in the Tower. The biographer is not satisfied with putting the bard into a dungeon; farther severities are conjured up against him; his apartment is supposed to have been changed for a worse. "It *is probable* that he was considered as a person of inferior consequence, and obliged to yield his apartment to some statesman of loftier title, who was a few days after conducted to the scaffold." Nay, further, it is Mr Godwin's opinion that his friends were denied access to him, and a *mouton* or jail-spy quartered in his chamber; both of which suppositions afford a good sentence or two of philosophical condolence.

"*It is likely* that he was forbidden the visits of his friends; but by the magic power of fancy he called about him celestial visitants. *It is likely* that a jailor or a turnkey was planted in his apartment, under pretence of checking unlicensed attempts at correspondence or escape, but in reality serving only to exclude him from one of the best inheritances of man, the power of being alone in the silence of elemental nature, and with his own thoughts. Chaucer, however, assisted by the workings of his mind, instead of seeing continually the base groom who attended him, saw only the gods who protected and cheered him in his cell."—Vol. ii. p. 477.

It is needless to examine what foundation exists for such vague suppositions, when we know that Chaucer was so much master of his time and thoughts during his confinement as to compose his Testament of Love. His biographer might with equal plausibility have grafted upon his story a supposed attempt to escape, and given us a Newgate calendar chapter from the horrors of Caleb Williams, or the languors of St Leon. These assertions rest entirely upon the *gratis dictum* of Mr Godwin, and, with a thousand others, are only introduced with an "it is possible," or "it is probable," or indeed the bare conjunction *if*, which, having been long renowned for a peace-maker, will doubtless in future be allowed equal virtue in compilation. But we are deeply interested, for our own sake, as well as that of the public, in entering our protest against this mode of book-making. If a biographer be at liberty to introduce into his story a full account of every contemporary subject of disquisition, however little connected with his hero, and can assume the further right of connecting his hero, by virtue of a gratuitous supposition, with whatever scenes he may take a fancy to

describe, it is obvious, that unless the author's mercy temper his strength, the rights of the courteous reader are in no small peril. To what length Mr Godwin might have extended his history, not so much of what Chaucer did actually *do*, as of what he and all his contemporaries *might*, *could*, *would*, or *should have done*, cannot now be exactly ascertained. He informs us in his Preface, that after writing about a thousand quarto pages, it was altogether uncertain when he might have drawn to a close. But there exists a superior power, to which even authors must "vail the honoured head," and, fortunately for the Reviewers, *Ecce Deus ex Machina!*

"If I, enamoured of my subject, might have thought no number of pages, or of volumes, too much for its developement, it was by no means impossible that purchasers and readers would think otherwise. My bookseller, who is professionally conversant with matters of this sort, assured me, that two volumes in quarto were as much as the public would allow the title of my book to authorize. It would be in vain to produce a work, whatever information it might comprise, which no one will purchase or read: I have therefore submitted to his decision."

Upon perusing this sentence, the cold drops stood upon our brow at contemplating the peril which we had escaped; and while we lauded the gods for Mr Phillips' tardy interference in our behalf, we marvelled not a little at the good man's easy faith, which had so long deferred it.

From these remarks upon the general structure of the work, we may now descend to view the execution of the plan, such as it is, beginning with what relates to Chaucer, who (*pars minima sui*) occupies the least share in his own memoirs. It appears to us, that, among the very few facts con-

cerning our bard, which Mr Godwin has given us, some are assumed without due evidence. For example, we are informed, that, "having passed through a certain course of education, Chaucer was removed to the University of Cambridge." The only proof which is brought of this assertion is, Chaucer's having termed himself, in the Court of Love, "Philogenet of Cambridge, clerk." But we cannot see how the acknowledged falsehood of one part of this designation can possibly prove the truth of the rest; or why Chaucer may not have invented a fictitious character to be attached to a false name. It seems to us much such an argument, as might be adduced to prove that the late Mr Mason resided at Knightsbridge, inasmuch as that was the pretended abode of the facetious Malcolm MacGregor. In like manner, we are very willing to suppose, that the old bard was a man of a jovial and festive habit; but we would rather infer this from his writings, than from supposing that he daily consumed the whole pitcher of wine which was allowed him by the King Indeed, from the address of the host to Chaucer, we imagine a personage of a grave and downcast appearance, very different from the idea we might form, *à priori*, of the jolly author of the Canterbury Tales: but it would be as ridiculous to argue from hence, that he was an enemy to mirth, as to hold that, with or without assistance, he daily discussed four bottles of wine, because he received such an allowance from the royal cellar.

The public are indebted to Mr Godwin for the recovery of Chaucer's evidence in a question about

bearing arms, occurring betwixt Scrope and Grosvenor;[1] but the manner in which it is narrated is a good illustration of the strained inferences concerning Chaucer's temper and disposition, deduced by his biographer, from the most common and trivial occurrences.

"Chaucer was a man of a frank and easy temper, undeformed by haughtiness and reserve, and readily entering into a certain degree of social intercourse on trivial occasions. This particular is strongly confirmed to us by the curious record of his testimony, in the cause of arms between Scrope and Grosvenor. He describes himself as walking in Friday Street, in the city of London, and observing there the arms he had seen always borne by the family of Scrope hung out as a sign. This inconsiderable circumstance immediately excites an interest in the patriarch of the English language, and English poetry. The Scropes were his friends. He accosts a stranger, whom he perceives accidentally standing by, and asks, 'What inn is that which I observe has hung out the arms of Scrope for its sign?'—'Nay,' replied the other, 'it is no inn, nor are these the arms of Scrope; they are the shield of a Cheshire family of the name of Grosvenor.' In Chaucer, the thus addressing himself to a person unknown, is no evidence of a vulgar, indelicate, and undiscriminating mind. It shows that he was a character, not fastidious enough to refuse to interest itself in trifles, and frank, even and affable in his intercourse with mankind."—Vol. ii. p. 569.

And all this is to be inferred from a question asked at a passenger, the fruit probably of momentary curiosity. This mode of drawing characters ought to supersede that of the ingenious Frenchman, who describes them accurately from seeing the party's handwriting.

While Mr Godwin was thus poring upon a millstone, and proclaiming his discoveries to the world,

[1] We hold this to be the only circumstance of importance which Mr Godwin's researches have brought to light; and so far our thanks are due to him.

we are surprised that he has omitted the famous tradition, that Chaucer, while in the Temple, was fined swo shillings " for beating a Franciscan friar in Fleet-Street." (See *Fuller* and *Speght*). This circumstance, with a proper allowance of *possibilities*, would have gone some length in eking out a third quarto. For, in the first place, it is naturally connected with the history of Fleet-Street, and Fleet-ditch, and the Fleet-Prison, and of Fleta the law-book, and of the fleet or royal navy, with some account of which (so naturally bearing upon the life of Chaucer) the reader must no doubt have been highly gratified. Secondly, the circumstance of the fine, would have happily introduced a history of the silver coinage, with an abbreviate of the Temple records, from the earliest period to the present day; and the political justice of fine and imprisonment might have been discussed in a separate chapter. Thirdly, the mention of the Franciscan would have paved the way with great propriety for a history of the mendicant orders, and have saved Mr Godwin the trouble and disgrace of foisting it in elsewhere, upon a much more flimsy pretext. (Vol. II. p. 20). But, above all, the cause of the scuffle, and the drubbing itself, would have led to many a learned dissertation. It is probable that one or both parties were in liquor. If so, when, how, or with what liquor did they become intoxicated? Was it with wine of Ape, or of Chepe; with Malverie, or with Hippocras? Was it together or separately? And can any light be thrown upon the combat, from the similar affray betwixt Justice Shallow when an Inn's of court

man, and Samson Stockfish the fruiterer? Again, it is probable that the quarrel originated in some theological dispute,—and the vast and thorny field of controversy might have been accurately surveyed, to enable the reader to fix upon the precise spot occupied by the disputants. Perhaps Chaucer offended the friar by the freedom of his conversation,—and why not insert all the jocose and satirical passages of the Canterbury Tales? To illustrate the nature of the beating, Mr Godwin might have described—

> ——" Your *souse*, your *wherit* and your *dowst*,
> *Tugs* on the hair, your *bob* o' the lips, your *thump*,
> ——your *kick*, the fury of a foot,
> Whose indignation commonly is stamped
> Upon the hinder quarters of a man,—
> With all your blows and blow-men whatsoever,
> Set in their lively colours, givers and takers."

All which knowledge is unfortunately lost to the world, perhaps through the ill-considered interference of Mr Phillips the publisher.

Some particular passages of the life are less fancifully and more correctly delineated. Mr Godwin combats, and in our opinion successfully, the opinion of those who deny the honourable claim of Thomas Chaucer, to call the poet father: and he has vindicated the relation, which the Dreme of Chaucer unquestionably bears to the History of John of Gaunt.

The critical dissertations upon Troilus and Creseide, and Chaucer's other poems, have considerable merit. They are the production of a man who has read poetry with taste and feeling; and we wish sincerely, that instead of the strange far-

rago which he calls the Life of Chaucer, he had given us a correct edition of the miscellaneous poetry of the author, upon the same plan with Mr Tyrwhitt's admirable Canterbury Tales. It is true, that we could not have expected from Mr Godwin, either the extensive learning or the accuracy of illustration which Mr Tyrwhitt has displayed. But, as already noticed, his critical disquisitions have occasional merit; and he might have pleaded the ancient prerogative of commentators, for writing in a more rambling and diffusive style than is consistent with the dignity of history or biography. Mr Godwin is sometimes rather hasty in his critical conclusions. He exclaims against Chaucer, for "polluting the portrait of Creseide's virgin character in the beginning of the poem, with so low and pitiful a joke as this—

> "But whether that she children had or none,
> I rede it not, therefore I let it gone."—Vol. i. p. 305.

If Mr Godwin had perused the poem attentively, he would have seen that no joke was intended, and that Creseide was no maiden, but in fact a young widow.

> "And as a widowe was she and alone."

And again, when invited by Pandarus to do honour to May,

> "Eighe! God forbid, quod she, what, be ye mad?
> Is that a *widowe's* lĩe, so God you save?
> It sate me wele better, aie in a cave
> To bide, and rede on holy saintis lives;
> Let *maidins gon to dance and young wives.*"

We were much surprised to find, that the Can-

terbury Tales, the most important, as well as the most exquisite of Chaucer's productions, have attracted so little of Mr Godwin's attention. He might have displayed, in commenting upon poems as varied in subject as in beauty, his whole knowledge of the manners of the middle ages, were it ten times more extensive. But Mr Godwin, beginning probably to write before he had considered either the nature of his subject, or the probable length of his work, had exhausted both his limits and materials ere he came to the topic upon which he ought principally to have dwelt. The characters, therefore, of the several pilgrims, so exquisitely described, that each individual passes before the eyes of the reader, and so admirably contrasted with each other; their conversation and manners, the gallantry of the Knight and Squire, the affected *sentimentality* of the Abbess, the humour of mine Host and the Wife of Bath; the pride of the Monk, the humility of the Parson, the learning and poverty of the Scholar, with the rude but comic portraits of the inferior characters, are, in the history of the life and age of Chaucer, of which they form a living picture, passed over in profound silence, or with very slight notice. The truth is, Mr Godwin's speed and strength were expended before he came within sight of the gaol, and he saw himself compelled with a faint apology to abandon that part of his subject which must have been universally interesting. The few remarks which he has made upon the Canterbury Tales, induce us to believe that he has seen and regretted his error; but it is a poor excuse, after writing a huge book, to tell the reader

that it is but "superficial work," because the author "came a novice to such an undertaking." (See Preface). It is the duty of an editor, to collect and arrange his materials before he begins to print his work; nor will the public be satisfied with an apology, which ought either to have deterred him from the undertaking entirely, or at least to have retarded the execution of it, till study and labour had supplied the defects of superficial information. As Mr Godwin is unquestionably a man of strong parts, we by no means discourage him from applying himself to illustrate the history of his country, but we would advise him in future, to read *before* he writes, and not merely *while* he is writing.

The history of "Old John of Gaunt, time honoured Lancaster," occupies a considerable portion of these volumes. He is styled in the titlepage, Chaucer's "near friend and kinsman;" an abuse of words, if, as we conceive, *kinsman* can only be correctly used to express a blood relation. John of Gaunt was undoubtedly Chaucer's patron, and ultimately stood in a certain degree of affinity to him, by marrying his concubine, a sister of the poet's wife; but this connexion could not give to the bard a portion of the blood of the Plantagenets, or render him in any sense the kinsman of the Duke of Lancaster. In the historical part of his work, Mr Godwin has proposed to himself a splendid plan. Antiquities had, in his opinion, hitherto been the province of

—"men of cold tempers, and sterile imaginations," whose works are compiled "with such narrow views, so total an absence of discrimination, and such an unsuspecting ignorance of the materials of which man is made, that the perusal of them

tends for the most part to stupify the sense, and to imbue the soul with moping and lifeless dejection. It was my wish, had my power held equal pace with my strong inclination, to carry the workings of fancy and the spirit of philosophy into the investigation of ages past. I was anxious to rescue, for a moment, the illustrious dead from the jaws of the grave, to make them pass in review before me, to question their spirits, and record their answers. I wished to make myself their master of ceremonies, to introduce my reader to their familiar speech, and to enable him to feel, for the instant, as if he had lived with Chaucer."—Preface, x.

This is well proposed, and expressed with that dignified contempt of his predecessors' labours, which especially becomes an author at the moment when he is about to avail himself of the information they afford him. But it is one thing to call spirits from the vasty deep, and another to compel their obedience to the invocation. When we expected to see the heroes of Cressy and Poitiers stalk past in the rude and antiquated splendour of chivalry, as perchance they might have appeared upon the summons of Warton, Ellis, or some such *cold-tempered, sterile-minded antiquary*, the philosophical phantasmagoria of Mr Godwin presented us with a very different set of beings. It seems to have been his rule, that if it be difficult to think like our ancestors, it is very easy to make them think like ourselves; and therefore, whatever motives Mr Godwin himself esteems praiseworthy and laudable, he imputes to his hero John of Gaunt, with all the liberality and contempt for congruity of the worthy squire who equipped his Vandyke portraits with modern periwigs. In this respect, the work reminds us of a particular class of novels, said to be "founded on real history," in which the *dramatis personæ*, are assumed from the ages of chivalry, but

apparelled in the sickly trim of sentiment peculiar to the Grevilles and Julias of Mr Lane's half-bound duodecimos. Mr Godwin's dukes and knights hold, in like manner, the language, we had almost said the cant, of his *soi-disant* philosophy ; and argue as learnedly of the nature of the human mind, of cause and effect, *and all that*, as if they had occasionally presided at Coachmakers' Hall. The Duke of Lancaster was unquestionably the wisest prince of his time ; yet his honoured shade must forgive us, if we deem him incapable of framing the profound and polite oration which he has here supposed to address to Chaucer, upon his being appointed an ambassador. We can only afford room to insert the following grand finale : " Man is a complex being, and is affected with mixed considerations ; and your contemporaries will listen with far different feelings to your beautiful and elevated productions, if they flow from an ambassador and a minister of state, than if you remained obscurely sheltered under your natal roof, in the city in which you were born, or sequestered among the groves and streams which adorn your neighbourhood at Woodstock." And this *twaddling* stuff is supposed to be spoken *by* John of Gaunt, and *to* Geoffrey Chaucer! And this is carrying " the workings of fancy," and the " spirit of philosophy," into the investigation of ages past, and " rescuing the illustrious dead from the jaws of the grave!" Imbued " with moping and lifeless dejection, and stupified" as we are, after the perusal of two huge quarto volumes of incoherent narrative and trite sentiment, we cannot help feel-

ing, at such absurdity, a momentary impulse of surprise and indignation!

Of the miscellaneous information contained in these volumes, we cannot be expected to treat at length, especially as the greater part of it has nothing to do with the proper subject of the book. It seems to us, that Mr Godwin, a novice, as he himself informs us, in the study of ancient history, had applied himself to his task with the ardour of a proselyte. Every fact, every peculiar view of manners which occurred in the course of his reading, had to him the charms of novelty; and he was benevolently eager to communicate to others the information which he had just acquired. But, unfortunately, a mind which has newly received a fresh train of ideas, is almost invariably found incapable to abridge or digest them, as no man can draw a map of a country which he traverses for the first time. Upon subjects not familiar to our thoughts, we must be contented to express ourselves with the crude prolixity of the works from which we have derived our information; and our attempts to be copious and distinct, will commonly produce but a string of tedious and ill-combined extracts, instead of a concise and luminous system. Hence the long, dull, and unnecessary details with which Mr Godwin has favoured us upon every subject which crossed his path. He could but write in proportion as he read, and empty his commonplace as fast only as he filled it. A comprehensive view of his subject we cannot possibly find in his writings; for it was at no time wholly before his own eyes. He

knew not when or where to stop ; and, in fact, was forced, from mere want of room, to abandon his work, half-finished, at the moment it became most interesting.

Some of the dissertations, considered abstractedly, possess considerable merit ; and we cannot refuse praise to the industry of Mr Godwin, who has acquired a great fund of knowledge, however ill-arranged, upon subjects to which he was so lately an utter stranger. We have already said, that we would be pleased to see some parts of his book arranged as notes upon Chaucer's poems. We find it impossible to "pick them in a pile of noisome and musty chaff;" but when they are brought forward in a work arranged upon a better plan, our approbation shall be conferred much more willingly than our present censure. A natural consequence of the hurry with which Mr Godwin has compiled his work, is the inaccuracy which has occasionally crept in, although less frequently than we could have thought possible. Vere, for example, the favourite of Richard II., is likened to "Carr, the minion of James I., with these advantages in favour of the former, that he was of an ancient family, and Carr an upstart," p. 366. This is a mistake. Carr, or Ker, Earl of Somerset, was the third son of Sir Thomas Ker of Fairnyhirst, the chief of a very ancient and powerful family, now represented by the Marquis of Lothian. As he had unfortunately little personal merit, it is hard to deprive him of the advantage of birth, which he really possessed. The universal predominance of the French language in the reign of Edward III. is expressed

with rather too much latitude, vol. i. p. 18. Previous to the birth of Chaucer, a remarkable change had begun to take place in this particular. Histories, and long poems of devotion and chivalry, were already translated out of the Romance or French language into English, and these in such numbers as sufficiently to demonstrate that they were not required for the use of the lower and middle classes alone. We should have been pleased to have seen the authority upon which the romances of *Robert sans peur* and *Robert le Diable* are ascribed to Wace, having esteemed these tales of later date than the Roman de Rou. The story of Anlaf the Dane, who is said to have penetrated into King Athelstane's tent, disguised as a minstrel, is rather apocryphal, especially with the miraculous decorations of William of Malmesbury. Mr Godwin seems to entertain some doubt of John of Gaunt's flight into Scotland, and residence at Holyrood-house. But no fact can be better attested. Andrew of Winton, a contemporary historian, has dedicated a chapter to show

> "Qhwen of Longcastele the Duke
> Refute intil Scotland tuk."—Book ix. c. 4.

He mentions particularly his progress, in which he was attended by Earl William of Douglas, from Berwick to Haddington, and thence to Edinburgh—

> "And intil Haly-rwde-hows that Abbay
> Thai made hym for to take herbry."

This circumstance, and the more recent asylum afforded in Scotland to Henry VI., are probably alluded to by Molinet, when he terms that country

"De tous siècles, le mendre
Et le plus tollerant."

The style of Mr Godwin's life of Chaucer is, in our apprehension, uncommonly depraved, exhibiting the opposite defects of meanness and of bombast. This is especially evident in those sentimental flourishes with which he has garnished his narrative, and which appear to us to be executed in a most extraordinary taste. In the following simile, for example, we hardly know whether most to admire the elegance and power of conception, or the happy ease and dignity of expression.

"Its slender pillars (the author is treating of the later Gothic architecture) may possess various excellences, but they are certainly not magnificent; and the shafts by which the pillars are frequently surrounded have an insignificant air, suggesting to us an idea of fragility, and almost reminding us of *the humble vehicle through which an English or German rustic inhales the fumes of the Indian weed.*"—Vol. i. p. 145.

In p. 181, we hear of "a tune, in which the luxuriance and multiplicity of musical sounds *obscures and tramples with disdain upon the majestic simplicity of words.*" In other places, we find "the *technicalities* of justice"—"the *religious nerve* of the soul of man"—young knights who looked upon the field of Roncesvalles with "*augmented circulation*"—"*unforshortened figures*"—an "ancient baron *neighboured* to a throne," and sundry other extremely new and whimsical expressions. But even these conceited barbarisms offend us less than the execrable taste displayed in the following account of Chaucer's early studies:

"He gave himself up to the impressions of nature, and to the sensations he experienced. He studied the writings of his con-

temporaries, and of certain of the ancients. He was learned according to the learning of his age. He wrote, because he felt himself impelled to write. He analyzed the models which were before him. He sought to please his friends and fellow scholars in the two Universities. He aspired to an extensive and lasting reputation."—Vol. i. p. 436.

We have no doubt that Mr Godwin considers these short sentences as the true model of a nervous and concise style. For our part, we find the sense so poor and trite, when compared with the pithy and sententious mode of delivery, that we feel in our closet the same shame we have sometimes experienced in the theatre, when a fourth-rate actor has exposed himself by mouthing, slapping his pockets, and, according to stage phrase, *making the most* of a trifling part. We will not pursue this subject any further, although we could produce from these ponderous tomes some notable instances of the mock heroic, and of the tone of false and affected sentiment. Such passages have tempted us to exclaim with Pandarus (dropping only one letter of his ejaculation),

> "Alas! alas! so noble a creature
> As is a man should *reden*[1] such ordure!"

Upon the whole, Mr Godwin's friends have, in one respect, great reason to be satisfied with the progress of his convalescence. We hope and trust, that the favourable symptoms of his case may continue. He is indeed now and then very *low*; or, in other words, uncommonly dull; but there is no apparent return of that fever of the spirits which alarmed us so much in his original publications.

[1] For *dreden*.

The insurrection of Jack Straw (a very dangerous topic) produces only a faint and moderate aspiration breathed towards the "sacred doctrines of equality," which it is admitted are too apt to be "rashly, superficially, and irreverently acted upon, involving their disciples in the most fearful calamity." The disgrace of Alice Pierce, or Perrers, the *chere amie* of Edward III., or, as Mr Godwin delicately terms her, "the chosen companion of his hours of retirement and leisure," calls down his resentment against the turbulence and rudeness of the Good Parliament. But less could hardly have been expected from the author of the memoirs of a late memorable female.[1]

We cannot help remarking that the principles of a modern philosopher continue to alarm the public, after the good man himself has abandoned them, just as the very truest tale will sometimes be distrusted from the habitual falsehood of the narrator. We fear this may have incommoded Mr Godwin in his antiquarian researches, more than he seems to be aware of. When he complains that private collectors declined "to part with their treasures for a short time out of their own hands," did it never occur to Mr Godwin that the maxims concerning property, contained in his "Political Justice," were not altogether calculated to conciliate confidence in the author?

But, upon the whole, the Life of Chaucer, if an uninteresting, is an innocent performance; and

[1] [Memoirs of Mary Woolstonecroft, author of "The Rights of Woman." 8vo. 1798.]

were its prolixities and superfluities unsparingly pruned (which would reduce the work to about one-fourth of its present size), we would consider it as an accession of some value to English literature.

ARTICLE IV.

TODD'S EDITION OF SPENSER.

[*From the Edinburgh Review for* 1805. *On the Works of* EDMUND SPENSER, *with the principal Illustrations of various Commentators: To which are added, Notes, some Account of the Life of* SPENSER, *and a Glossarial and other Indexes. By the Reverend* JOHN TOD, M.A. F.A.S. 8 *vols.* 1805.]

A COMPLETE and respectable edition of Spenser's works, has been long a *desideratum* in English literature. Indeed, to what purpose do our antiquaries purchase at high rates, and peruse, at the cost of still more valuable leisure and labour, the treasures of the black letter, which, in themselves, have usually so very little to repay their exertions? Surely, the only natural and proper use of the knowledge thus acquired, is to throw light, as well upon our early literature, as on the man-

ners and language of our ancestors, by re-editing and explaining such of our ancient authors as have suffered by the change of both. Amongst these, Spenser must ever be reckoned one of the most eminent; for no author, perhaps, ever possessed and combined, in so brilliant a degree, the requisite qualities of a poet. Learned, according to the learning of his times, his erudition never appears to load or encumber his powers of imagination; but even the fictions of the classics, worn out as they are by the use of every pedant, become fresh and captivating themes, when adopted by his fancy, and accommodated to his plan. If that plan has now become to the reader of riper years somewhat tedious and involved, it must be allowed, on the other hand, that from Cowley downwards, every youth of imagination has been enchanted with the splendid legends of the Faëry Queen. It was therefore with pleasure that we turned to the examination of a work, which promised to recall the delightful sensations of our earlier studies; and if we have been in some respects disappointed in the perusal, we do not impute it altogether to want of diligence or accuracy on the part of Mr Todd, whose commentary, so far as it goes, is in both respects commendable. In the Life of Spenser, which is the longest specimen of original composition, he has brought forward several new facts, and evinced a laudable anxiety to throw light upon the story, by comparison of dates, and investigation of contemporary documents. The result of his labours is stated in so modest a manner, as ought, in some degree, to disarm the harshness of criti-

cism. He himself terms it "a very humble account of the Life of Spenser, drawn from authentic records, the curiosity and importance of which, will, I trust, be admitted by the liberal and candid as an apology for the want of biographical elegance."

It is, however, our duty to point out some defects in the plan of this Memoir, by avoiding which, we apprehend, much might have been added to its perspicuity and elegance, without the least derogation from its authenticity.

The events of Spenser's earlier life are, in some measure, extracted from a correspondence betwixt the poet and Gabriel Harvey, the same against whom Nash wrote the satire, well known among collectors, entitled, "Have with you to Saffron-Walden, or Gabriel Harvey's Hunt's up." It was highly meritorious in Mr Todd to peruse these letters, and to consider them as proper materials for his biography. But we are disposed to blame him, first, because he has not republished an entire copy of this curious correspondence, which was of so much importance to the matter in hand; and, secondly, because, instead of printing the letters as an appendix to the life, he has thrust large extracts from them into the midst of his own narrative. Nothing, indeed, in our opinion, could have a more confused and inelegant effect than this medley of narrative and quotation. The biographer should always study to give his work the appearance of continuity. He may and ought to refer distinctly to the sources of his information; and where there is doubt, the words of the original documents may be subjoined in a note to justify his inference; but

the text ought to be expressed historically, and in the language of the author himself. It is extremely awkward to jump from the words of the narrator into those of Spenser, and has, besides, the effect of making one part of the memoir bear a great disproportion to the other; for the letter-writer spends much more time in discussing the matter then immediately before him, than the biographer has probably an opportunity of bestowing upon incidents of much greater importance. Nevertheless, although these letters are thus thrust upon our hands in a disorderly manner, the extracts have afforded us amusement, and give room, as we have already hinted, to regret that they had not been printed separately, with such explanatory notes as Mr Todd's researches suggested. We perceive from thence, that Spenser had busied himself in the fruitless and unharmonious task of versifying, as it was then called, that is, of composing English verses according to the Latin prosody. He seems, at the same time, to have been fully sensible of the difficulty of the attempt, and we wonder at his perseverance, after the humour with which he describes its effects.

"I like your late Englishe Hexameters so exceedingly well, that I also enure my penne sometime in that kinde: whyche I fynd indeede, as I have heard you often defende in worde, neither so harde nor so harshe, that it will easily and fairely yeelde it selfe to oure moother tongue. For the onely, or chiefest hardnesse, whyche seemeth, is in the accente; whyche sometime gapeth, and as it were yawneth ilfavouredly; comming shorte of that it should, and sometime exceeding the measure of the number, as in *Carpenter*, the middle sillable being used shorte in speache, when it shall be read long in verse, seemeth like a lame gosling, that draweth one legge after hir: and *Heaven*, being used shorte as one sillable when it is in verse, stretched

out with a diastole, is like a lame dogge that holdes up one legge. But it is to be wonne with custome, and rough words must be subdued with use. For, why a God's name may not we, as else the Greekes, have the kingdome of our owne language, and measure our accentes by the sounde, reserving the quantitie to the verse? Loe here I let you see my olde use of toying in rymes, turned into your artificial straightnesse of verse by this *Tetrasticon*. I beseech you tell me your fancie, without parcialitie.

"See yee the blindefoulded pretie god, that feathered archer,
Of lovers miseries which maketh his bloodie game?
Wote ye why his moother with a veale hath covered his face?
Truste me, least he my Loove happely chaunce to beholde."

We could hardly have suspected Spenser, the marshalled march of whose stanza is in general so harmonious, of drilling the stubborn and unmanageable words of the English language into such strange doggrel. The verses are truly "lame and o'erburthened, and screaming their wretchedness."

From another passage in this correspondence, the young poet may learn how little he ought to rely upon the taste even of the ablest counsellor. Harvey was a scholar, and, in some sense, even a poet; he was, moreover, Spenser's *long approved and singular good friend;* nevertheless, Gabriel had the assurance to write the following libel upon the Faëry Queen, for the conceited pedantry of which he deserves a worse *Hunts up* than was played him by Nashe.

"In good faith I had once againe nigh forgotten *your Faërie Queene:* howbeit, by good chaunce I have nowe sent hir home at the laste, neither in better nor worse case than I found hir. And must you, of necessitie, have my judgment of hir in deede? To be plaine; I am voyde of al judgement, if your [1]nine Comædies, whereunto, in imitation of Herodotus, you give the names of the Nine Muses (and in one mans fansie not unworthily),

[1] "It is to be lamented," says Mr Cooper Walker, in a letter to Mr Todd, "that Spenser's *nine Comedies*, so much extolled by Harvey, are lost."

come not neerer Ariostoes *Comædies*, eyther for the finenesse of plausible elocution, or the rarenesse of poetical invention, than that *Elvish Queene* doth to his *Orlando Furioso;* which, notwithstanding, you wil needes seeme to emulate, and hope to overgo, as you flatly professed yourself in one of your last Letters. But I will not stand greatly with you in your owne matters. If so be the *Fairie Queene* be fairer in your eie than the Nine Muses, and Hobgoblin runne away with the garland from Apollo; marke what I saye; and yet I will not say that [which] I thought; but there an end for this once, and fare you well till God, or some good Aungell, putte you in *a better mind.*"—P. xlv. xlvi.

There is another circumstance which gives Mr Todd's Life of Spenser a more clumsy and ungainly appearance than the matter itself really deserves. It has been observed long ago, that the history of an author is the history of his works; and therefore Mr Todd has, with great propriety, regularly recorded the various publications of his author, in the order in which they were given to the world; but, from a want of arrangement, not peculiar to this editor, he has uniformly appended to his notices of these publications, a variety of circumstances, illustrative of their contents, which properly make no part of Spenser's life, although they ought to have been introduced as notes upon his writings. It certainly is not always easy to separate exactly the department of the biographer from that of the commentator; but it is obvious, that to interrupt the narrative, by notes critical and illustratory, must necessarily destroy the effect of both. To these preliminary observations, which affect rather the manner than the matter of Mr Todd's memoir, we subjoin the leading incidents of Spenser's life, as they have been illustrated by his industry.

The fame of this poet, however great during his lifetime, seems to have excited no enquiry into his parentage. He himself informs us that he was born in

> "Merry London, my most kindly nurse,
> That to me gave this life's first native source,
> Though from another place I take my name,
> A house of ancient fame."

But although Spenser alludes repeatedly to his gentle birth, and claims kindred with several persons of rank, his parents were entirely unknown; a circumstance which Mr Todd, in beginning his life, passes over without commentary. It appears from a passage in one of his sonnets, that the Christian name of his mother was Elizabeth; and this is all we know of the matter. The birth of the poet is conjectured to have taken place about 1553; but the first event of his life which has been ascertained, is his admission as a sizer of Pembroke Hall, in Cambridge, 1569, where he acquired the degree of Bachelor and Master of Arts in 1572–3 and 1576. Here commenced his intimacy with Gabriel Harvey. He seems to have been disappointed, either in his views of a fellowship, or of some other academical distinction, which has not prevented his gratitude to his *alma mater* from breaking forth in his account of the Ouze, who

> "Doth by Huntingdon and Cambridge flit;
> My mother Cambridge, whom, as with a crown,
> He doth adorn, and is adorned of it,
> With many a gentle muse, and many a learned wit."

From the University, Spenser seems to have retired to some friends in the north. Of the cause

of his journey, or his occupation while with them, we have no record. Here he composed, besides lesser poems, the Shepherd's Calendar; a work which, in some places, exhibits a beautiful model of pastoral poetry, and, in others, that turn for allegorizing and moralizing two meanings in the same tale, which afterwards gave rise to the Faëry Queen.

It is supposed that some passages in these poems, of a nature rather political than pastoral, particularly a warm eulogium on Archbishop Grendal, drew down upon our author the wrath of the great Burleigh; the effects of which, although deprecated by Spenser, and exaggerated perhaps by former biographers, certainly continued to attend him through his life. It was in vain he ascribed to a commentary of the Blatant Beast Slander, that construction of his poetry which had drawn on him "a mighty peer's displeasure." It was in vain that, among the worthies of Elizabeth's court, to whom he addressed separate sonnets with his Faëry Queen, he distinguished Burleigh by the most flattering strain of adulation. We find, from repeated passages in his works, that his offence was never forgotten or forgiven. But the Shepherd's Calendar, although unfortunate in making our poet one powerful and inveterate enemy, secured him many active and distinguished friends. Its fame was the means of introducing him to the friendship of Sir Philip Sidney, and to that of Leicester; a more powerful, if less discerning patron. The latter received Spenser into his house, though in what capacity does not precisely appear; perhaps in

order to facilitate the composition of the *Stemmata Dudleiana*, an account of the Earl's genealogy, with which Spenser appears to have been busied in 1580. At this time the poet was also engaged with his Faëry Queen, with the Dying Pellican, with the Visions, which he afterwards published in a more correct shape, and sundry less important labours. About July, in the same year, he received, doubtless through the patronage of Lord Leicester, the honourable appointment of secretary to Arthur Lord Grey, then nominated Lord-lieutenant of Ireland, which he held till Lord Grey's return to England in 1582. Spenser appears to have been sincerely attached to this nobleman, whom he has distinguished in his Faëry Queen under the character of Arthegal, or Justice. Lord Grey's course with the Irish was that of severity, for excess of which he seems to have been recalled to England. Hence Spenser describes Arthegal, when returning from the adventure of succouring Irene, as leaving his work unfinished.

> "But, ere he could reform it thoroughly,
> He through occasion called was away
> To Faëry Court, that of necessity
> His course of justice he was forced to stay."

On his return, the victorious knight is attacked by Envy, by Detraction, and by the Blatant Beast, or Slander, who railed against him;

> "Saying that he had, with unmanly guile
> And foul abusion, both his honour blent,
> And that bright sword, the sword of justice lent,
> Had stained with reproachful cruelty
> In guiltless blood of many an innocent:
> As for Grandtorto, him with treacherie
> And traines having surprised, he foully did to die."

This last accusation is referred by Upton to Lord Grey's putting to death the Spaniards who held out the fort of Smerwick, after they had surrendered to him at discretion; which "sharp execution" Spenser has justified at more length in his State of Ireland. After the recall of Lord Grey, the poet's services in the state, and perhaps also his poetical fame, was rewarded by the grant of the castle of Kilcolman, in the county of Cork, and 3028 acres out of the forfeited estate of the Earl of Desmond. Mr Todd has copied, from Smith's History of the County of Cork, the following interesting account of our poet's residence upon this property, during the happiest period of his life.

"'Two miles north-west of Doneraile is Kilcolman, a ruined castle of the Earls of Desmond; but more celebrated for being the residence of the immortal Spenser, where he composed his divine poem, *The Faerie Queene*. The castle is now almost level with the ground. It was situated on the north side of a fine lake, in the midst of a vast plain, terminated to the east by the county of Waterford mountains; Ballyhowra hills to the north, or, as Spenser terms them, the mountains of Mole; Nagle mountains to the south; and the mountains of Kerry to the west. It commanded a view of above half of the breadth of Ireland; and must have been, when the adjacent uplands were wooded, a most pleasant and romantic situation; from whence, no doubt, Spenser drew several parts of the scenery of his poem. The river Mulla, which he more than once has introduced in his poems, ran through his grounds.' Here, indeed, the poet has described himself, as keeping his flock under the foot of the mountain Mole, amongst the cooly shades of green aldars, by the shore of Mulla; and charming his oaten pipe (as his custom was) to his fellow shepherd-swains."—*Life*, p. l. li.

We are here tempted to copy two stanzas, descriptive of Spenser's tranquil retreat, and contain-

ing, especially the first, the most happy imitation of the rich and artful melody of his versification.

"Awake, ye west windes, through the lonely dale,
And Fancy to thy faerie bower betake;
Even now with balmie freshness breathes the gale,
Dimpling with downie wing the stilly lake;
Through the pale willows faultering whispers wake
And evening comes with locks bedropt with dew;
On Desmond's mouldering turrets slowly shake
The trembling rie-grass and the hare-bell blew;
And ever and anon fair Mulla's plaints renew.

"O for the namelesse power to strike mine eare,
The power of charm by Naiads once possest!
Melodious Mulla! when full oft while eare
Thy gliding numbers soothed the gentle brest
Of haplesse Spenser, long with woes opprest,
Long with the drowzie patron's smiles decoyed,
Till in thy shades, no more with cares distrest,
No more with painful, anxious hopes accloyed,
The Sabbath of his life the mild good man enjoyed."

The delight of these halcyon days was enhanced by a visit which Sir Walter Raleigh made to his estates in our author's vicinity in 1589. To the criticism of the Shepherd of the Ocean, as Spenser elsewhere termed him, the poet submitted such books of the Faëry Queen as he had then finished; and was determined, by his ardent approbation, immediately to prepare them for the press. For this purpose, he accompanied Sir Walter in his return to England; and in 1590, the three first books of this beautiful poem were given to the world. The author of a romantic poem did not remain long unrewarded in the romantic court of Elizabeth. The Earl of Essex, who replaced, as the flower of chivalry, the amiable Sidney, was now

added to Spenser's former patrons; and, under their auspices, our poet received from Queen Elizabeth a pension of L.50 yearly; and perhaps the list of laureate dulness has some title to be illuminated by the name of Spenser. Some farther advantages, probably a permanent establishment in Britain, appear to have been unsuccessfully solicited by our author; for the striking lines, describing the miseries of a suitor for court favour, have been always understood to refer to his own disappointments.

> "Full little knowest thou, that hast not tried,
> What hell it is, in suing long to bide:
> To lose good days, that might be better spent;
> To waste long nights in pensive discontent;
> To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow;
> To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow;
> To have thy princess' grace, yet want her peers';
> To have thy asking, yet wait many years;
> To frett thy soul with crosses and with cares;
> To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs;
> To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to ronne;
> To spend, to give, to want, to be undone."
>
> *Mother Hubbard's Tale.*

In the same satire and elsewhere, Spenser has not hesitated to launch the darts of his satire against his powerful enemy Lord Burleigh. After the publication of the Faëry Queen in 1590, Spenser seems to have returned to Ireland, where he was soon after married. The progress of his passion and its success is celebrated in his sonnets and Epithalamion. Mr Todd supposes this happy event to have taken place in 1594. The surname of the beautiful Elizabeth has escaped the researches of the biographer. In the year 1595, to omit

lesser particulars, the next three books of the Faëry Queen made their appearance. There is an unauthorized story told by Sir James Ware, that about this time Spenser had written the remaining six cantos of that beautiful poem, which were afterwards lost by the carelessness of his servant in passing from Ireland. But it appears much more probable, that the work was never completed by the author, especially when we consider how long he had dwelt upon the first three books. It is too certain that, if any fragments, excepting the two cantos of "Mutabilitie," did ever exist, they are entirely lost to the world, and were probably destroyed in the wreck of our author's fortune, when his house was pillaged by the rebels. Spenser visited England in 1596, when he appears to have presented to the Queen and her ministers his View of the State of Ireland; which probably induced Elizabeth to recommend him to the office of sheriff of Cork, by a letter dated in September, 1598. But, in October following, Tyrone, who had been long in arms, obtained that signal victory over Sir Henry Bagnol, marshal of Ireland, which was long after remembered by the name of the Defeat of Blackwater. He instantly summoned his secret confederates in Munster to imitate him in assailing the English settlers. The call was obeyed; and the insurrection, like those we have had the misfortune to witness in later times, broke out with the irresistible fury of a volcano. At the head of the Munster rebels was James Fitzthomas Geraldine, titular Earl of Desmond. It was natural that he and his followers should be inflamed

with the most bitter indignation against "the English Undertakers," as they were called, to whom the forfeited estates of the Geraldines had been granted after Desmond's war.

"And to speak truth," says Fynes Morrison, who had the best access to know the fact, "Munster undertakers were in great part cause of this defection, and of their own fatal miseries. For, whereas they should have built castles, and brought over colonies of English, and have admitted no Irish tenant, but only English, these and like covenants were in no part performed by them. Of whom the men of best quality never came over, but made profit of the land; others brought no more English than their own families; and all entertained Irish servants and tenants, which were now the first to betray them. If the covenants had been kept by them, they themselves might have made two thousand able men; whereas, the Lord President could not find above two hundred of English birth amongst them, when the rebels first entered the province. Neither did these gentle undertakers make any resistance to the rebels; but left their dwellings, and fled to walled towns; yea, when there was such danger in flight, as greater could not have been in defending their own, whereof many of them had woful experience, being surprised with their wives and families in flight."

We have been full in our account of this insurrection, because Mr Todd has not thought proper to explain to his readers either the nature of the grants to the Munster Undertakers, of whom Spenser was one, or the progress of the insurrection, by which our author was so great a sufferer. Indeed, he has always substituted *Tyrone's* rebellion for that of *Desmond*, with dubious propriety, since that branch of the rebellion by which Spenser suffered is allowed to have burst forth in October, 1598; which is true of the Munster insurrection, but not of the original war of Tyrone, which had already raged in Ulster for several years. Spenser, who held the castle and estate of Kilcolman, an

ancient appanage of the Geraldines, who had been clerk of council for the province, and who, in his View of Ireland, had advised that future Lieutenants should follow the example of the severe and inflexible Grey, had little mercy to hope from the rebels. Accordingly, he fled with precipitation,—such precipitation, that an infant child of the poet's appears to have been left behind, who perished when the rebels burned his castle. He arrived in London in misery and indigence. The bounty of Essex and of his other friends might save him from the extremity of poverty; but, in proportion as the sufferers under a calamity are numerous, relief becomes more difficult, and individual distress is regarded with less commiseration. Spenser never subdued the impressions of sorrow and misfortune. He died of a broken heart at London, in January, 1599.

We have thus made a brief analysis of Todd's Life of Spenser, which is the principal portion of original matter contributed to this edition by the editor. The Memoir, in point of style, is of a dry, sober, and sleepy cast: elegance has not perhaps been aimed at; certainly it has not been attained.

To the life is subjoined a list of the editions of Spenser, and of his professed imitators. To the latter might have been added the unknown author of the Battle of the Sexes, an allegorical poem, in the manner of Spenser, which, though now forgotten, contains some very striking passages.

The edition of the poems themselves is published *cum notis variorum;* so that instead of extracting from his predecessors' labours their

spirit and essence, Mr Todd has overlaid poor Spenser with the unselected mass of their commentaries in addition to his own; and, after all, we are much afraid the text is, in many instances, rather burdened than assisted. In fact, as no author deserved the commentary of a kindred spirit so much as Spenser, we are greatly surprised that the task has not been long since undertaken by some person better qualified than Upton, Hughes, Church, or even Tom Warton himself. As none merits, so perhaps few English authors so much require, the assistance of a skilful commentator. The plan of the Faëry Queen is much more involved than appears at first sight to a common reader. Spenser himself has intimated this in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh prefixed to the poem. For he there mentions, that he has often a general and particular intention, as when he figures, under Gloriana, the general abstract idea of glory, but also the particular living person of Queen Elizabeth. This "continued allegory or dark conceit," therefore, contains, besides the general allegory or moral, many particular and minute allusions to persons and events in the court of Queen Elizabeth, as well as to points of general history. The ingenuity of a commentator would have been most usefully employed in decyphering what, "for avoiding of jealous opinions and misconstructions," our author did not choose to leave too open to the contemporary reader. But although every thing belonging to the reign of the Virgin Queen carries with it a secret charm to Englishmen, no commentator of the Faëry Queen has taken the trouble to

go very deep into those annals, for the purpose of illustrating the secret, and as it were, esoteric allusions of Spenser's poems. Upton is the only one who has pointed out some of these relations and allusions; but he has neither been sufficiently particular, nor is the low vulgar familiarity of his style a fit accompaniment to the lofty verse of Spenser. Church and Hughes both remain in the court of the Gentiles; and the present worthy commentator adds little to their labours, save a few crumbs of verbal criticism. We fear they have verified the saying of Hamlet, that a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear. Those political innuendos which Spenser wrapt up in mystery and allegory, may even remain like unexpounded oracles, for all the light these learned gentlemen can throw upon them. They have not even followed the clue thrown out by Upton. As for the late laureate, it is well known that he could never follow a clue of any kind. With a head abounding in multifarious lore, and a mind unquestionably imbued with true poetic fire, he wielded that most fatal of all implements to its possessor, a pen so scaturient and unretentive, that we think he himself must have been often astonished, not only at the extent of his lucubrations, but at their total and absolute want of connexion with the subject he had assigned to himself. Thus, instead of a history of poetry, he presented the world with three huge volumes of mingled and indigested quotations and remarks, in which the reader, like the ancient alchymists in their researches, is sure to meet every thing but what he is seeking for. Had Mr Warton, there-

fore, sat down to explain the political allusions of Spenser, he would probably have commenced with an erudite history of Crœsus, king of Lydia. So useless are parts and erudition, when not directed soberly and steadily to the illustration of the point in hand. It may be expected that we should produce some examples of the crimes of omission imputable to Mr Todd and his predecessors.

The Red-Cross Knight, in the obvious and general interpretation, signifies, "Holiness;" or, the perfection of the Spiritual Man in Religion. But, in the political and particular sense, the adventures of St George bear a peculiar and obvious, though not a uniform, reference to the history of the Church of England as established by Queen Elizabeth. Thus, we find the orthodox church, in its earlier history, surmounting the heresies of the Arians, and many others; as the Red-Cross Knight, while animated by the voice of Una or Truth, destroys the monster Error and her brood. Again, he defeats Sans Foy, but falls into the snares of Duessa, the leman of the vanquished knight. Thus the church, in the reign of Constantine, triumphed over Paganism, but was polluted by Error in consequence of its accession to temporal sovereignty. Hence its purity was affected by those vices which are described as inhabiting the house of Pride; and, becoming altogether relaxed in discipline, the church was compelled to submit to the domination of the Pope. These events are distinctly figured out in the imprisonment of the Red-Cross Knight in the Castle of Orgoglio, and in Duessa's assuming the trap-

pings and seven-headed palfrey of the Whore of Babylon. Here the poet also seems dimly to have shadowed forth what was not too plainly to be named—the persecution in the days of Queen Mary.

> " But all the floor (too filthy to be told)
> With blood of guiltless babes and innocents true,
> Which there were slain as sheep out of the fold,
> Defiled was, that dreadful was to view ;
> And sacred ashes over it was strowed new."

The conquest of Orgoglio and Duessa do therefore plainly figure forth the downfall of Popery in England, as the enlargement of the Red-Cross signifies the freedom of the Protestant Church, happily accomplished by the accession of Queen Elizabeth. Yet these obvious inferences have escaped the commentators of Spenser.

The affection of Timias for Belphæbe, is allowed, on all hands, to allude to Sir Walter Raleigh's pretended admiration of Queen Elizabeth ; and his disgrace, on account of a less Platonic intrigue with the daughter of Sir Nicolas Throgmorton, together with his restoration to favour, are plainly pointed out in the subsequent events. But no commentator has noticed the beautiful insinuation by which the poet points out the error of his friend, and of his friend's wife. Timias finds Amoret in the arms of Corflambo, or sensual passion ; he combats the monster unsuccessfully, and wounds the lady in his arms. We have not time to go through many other minute circumstances alluding to the history and intrigues of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Many of them are noticed in Upton's notes ; but, we think, without sufficiently detailing the autho-

rities on which he grounds his explanation. The fiery spirit of the unfortunate Earl of Westmoreland is detected under the personage of Blandamour, fickle both in friendship and in love, and easily heated into brawls, even when an exile in the Prince of Parma's court; of which the instance in the note might with propriety have been quoted. Mr Todd has, however, added nothing to what Upton has done, in explanation of Spenser's historical allusions, although that poet himself hath told us,

> "Of faëry lond yet if he more inquire,
> By certain signs, here set in sundry place,
> He may it find; ne let him then admire,
> But yield his sense to be too blunt and base,
> That note without a hound fine footing trace."

But there is another, and perhaps still more interesting source of enquiry, opened by the perusal of Spenser's poem. We allude to the state of Italian literature at the period when he wrote. That country had awakened from the sleep of barbarous ignorance, at least three centuries before the rest of Europe, and had already decorated, with classical imagery and allusions, many a story of Gothic origin. It would be necessary to plunge deep into the history of their poetry to explain the extent to which Spenser has made it the object of his imitation; and in this Mr Todd appears to us to have failed in research or in success. In fact, that gentleman's ambition seems to have been limited to the humble task of choosing betwixt contested readings, in which he is generally guided by sound judgment, and in explaining obsolete

words, in which he is sometimes insufferably and unnecessarily prolix. For example, the common word *port*, applied to personal carriage, is authorized by a note about the *port* and *countenance* of the lord mayor of London. There is another long note about the expression "hurly-burly," which elegant phrase he does us the honour to deduce from Scotland. There is also a prodigious long quotation from Don Quixote, to verify the fact, that knights-errant, like most other people, bestowed names upon their horses. We have also tedious discussions, not the less dull for being backed with classical authority, upon such questions as, whether Spenser did write, or ought to have written Acidalian, or Aridalian; and not a heathen god or goddess escapes, without a full account of their breed and generation, for which, perhaps, the reader might have been briefly referred to Tooke's Pantheon. On the other hand, many obscure references, which do not fall within the course of general study, are left unexplained, or perhaps the perplexed reader is coolly referred to some work of rare occurrence for the solution. Thus, for the prophecy concerning the "fatal Welland," we are in a great measure turned over to the instruction of Anthony a Wood; and no information at all is given concerning the ancient fabulous history of Britain, which Spenser so often refers to, and upon which every day is now throwing more light.

But it was chiefly in that very curious and interesting tract, the View of the State of Ireland, that Spenser required the aid of a commentator to

elucidate his positions as a historian and antiquary, and very frequently to correct his answers. Hardly any picture is more interesting than that of the poet reviewing at once with fear and with some degree of respect, the manners of the rude natives by whom he was surrounded; and it is a shame to literature that nothing has been added worth noticing to what Sir James Ware has long since said on so curious a subject.

To conclude, we are well aware that the trade find their advantage in publishing what are technically called Variorum editions of celebrated authors. It saves copy money, saves trouble, saves every thing but the credit of the unfortunate poet. Where the poet and commentator are fairly opposed to each other, the former has at least some chance of coming off victorious; but five to one would be odds even against Gully or the Game Chicken; and it is impossible that an ordinary reader can form a just judgment of the text, which is absolutely borne down and overwhelmed by the dull, dubious, and contradictory commentaries of so many uncongenial spirits. Their regard for the author is expressed like the gratitude of the Gauls, who overwhelmed with their bucklers the virgin to whom they were indebted for the conquest of a city.

ARTICLE V.

HERBERT'S POEMS.

[*From the Edinburgh Review*, 1806. *On "Miscellaneous Poetry." By the Honourable* W. HERBERT, 2 *vols.* 8vo. 1805.]

THESE little volumes contain a variety of translations from the Norse, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, &c., with a few original pieces. Those by which we have been most interested, are contained under the title of "Select Icelandic Poetry," being versions of celebrated passages in the Edda of Sæmundar, and other specimens of Scaldic poetry. These translations form the *first* part of the first volume, and the *second* part of the second; a confused and capricious arrangement, which we wish had been avoided. They are, to a certain degree, a novelty in our literature; for although translations of many of these very pieces have been made by poets of different degrees of merit, from Gray to Amos Cottle, yet it has happened, rather perversely, that not one of these translators understood the original Icelandic, but contented themselves with executing their imitations from the Latin version, and thus presenting

their readers with the shadow of a shade. We can only estimate the injustice which the old Scalds sustained in this operation, by considering what sort of translation could be made of any Greek poet from the Latin version. Mr Herbert has stepped forward to rescue these ancient poets from this ignominious treatment; and his intimate acquaintance with the languages of the North is satisfactorily displayed in an introductory address to the Hon. C. Anker, Director of the Danish East Indian Company, executed in Danish poetry, as well as by many learned criticisms scattered through the work. We do not pretend any great knowledge of the Norse; but we have so far "traced the Runic rhyme," as to be sensible how much more easy it is to give a just translation of that poetry into English than into Latin; and, consequently, how much is lost by the unnecessary intermediate transfusion. Indeed, the double difficulty of first rendering the Norse into the Latin, and then the Latin into the English, and thus interposing a version in a foreign and uncongenial tongue, between the original and the English, although this last is a kindred language, very similar, in its more ancient idiom to the Icelandic, has led to many, and some very absurd errors, in what has hitherto been given as Scaldic poetry. For example, in the famous death-song of Regnar Lodbrog, that renowned warrior has been made to assert, that the joy of a bloody battle, which he had just described, was superior to that of sleeping with a young virgin; and in another passage, he is made to aver yet more specifically, that the pleasure of

battering the helmet with the keen falchion, was like that of kissing a young widow reclining upon a high seat. Now, whatever partiality Regnar might entertain for the sport of swords, the dance of Hilda, and for his favourite amusement of hacking with helmets, he had too much taste to give the preference imputed in these passages, which are thus justly rendered by Mr Herbert.

> "Bucklers brast, and men were slain,
> Stoutest skulls were cleft in twain.
> 'Twas *not*, I trow, like wooing rest
> On gentle maiden's snowy breast."

Again—

> "where falchions keen
> Bit the helmet's polish'd sheen.
> 'Twas *not* like kissing widow sweet
> Reclining in the highest seat."

Such was the real and unbiassed opinion of Regnar with the Hairy Breeches; and truly we heartily join in it. The elegant Mason, as well as Bishop Percy, fell into a similar blunder in translating the love-song of Harold the valiant, which they understood to be a complaint, that, notwithstanding all the great deeds which he had performed, "a Russian maiden scorned his love." Now, this burden is accurately rendered by Mr Herbert, after Perinskiold,

> "With golden ring in Russian land,
> To me the virgin plights her hand."

Having noticed these gross errors, it is unnecessary to say how much of the spirit of the poetry, which is so much more volatile, must necessarily have escaped in versions, where even plain sense and meaning is so sadly corrupted. We therefore

hail with pleasure an attempt to draw information from the fountain-head, especially where it is interesting both in point of intrinsic poetic merit, and as a curious source of historic investigation.

The character of the ancient Scaldic poetry is various. It is often, especially when mythological, so extremely obscure, that it defies interpretation. This seems to proceed chiefly from the metaphorical and paraphrastic style, which was considered as an high ornament in such compositions. Instead of giving the name of a person mentioned, it is the fashion to call him the son of such a one, or the brother or the spouse of such another; and as the said father, brother, or wife, had probably fifty names, it becomes extremely difficult, in many cases, to hit upon the individual who is intended. In like manner, a ship is the sea serpent, or the rider of the wave, or the *ask* or water-newt, or something else which still less readily conveys the meaning. In poems composed in this style, it seems to have been the object of the poet to convert every line into a sort of riddle, for the exercise of the ingenuity of the hearer, who was thus obliged to fight his way from one verse to another, having, for his sole reward, the pleasure of penetrating mystery, and conquering studied obscurity. Great part of the Edda of Sæmund is involved in this artificial darkness, and is therefore positively untranslateable. But in the more popular poetry, the romances, war-odes, and songs sung to the great in their festivals, when their Honours, like Mungo in the farce, probably wished to hear something which they could understand, another and more simple

kind of poetry was adopted. The following very singular poem affords a curious specimen of this latter kind of composition; for though the personages are mythological, yet the tale is romantic, and the style of a simple kind, adapted to general comprehension. It is called the song of Thrym, or the Recovery of the Hammer, from the principal personage and incident. This hammer was a sort of sceptre or mace, used by Thor, the Mars of the Scandinavians, and on which much of his power depended. It was probably like those maces of arms which were used in war as low as the middle of the seventeenth century.[1] The translation is so admirably executed, that it might be mistaken for an original.

"Wrath waxed Thor, when his sleep was flown,
And he found his trusty hammer gone;
He smote his brow, his beard he shook,
The son of earth 'gan round him look;
And this the first word that he spoke;
'Now listen what I tell thee, Loke;
Which neither on earth below is known,
Nor in Heaven above; my hammer's gone.
Their way to Freyia's bower they took,
And this the first word that he spoke;
'Thou, Freyia, must lend a winged robe,
To seek my hammer round the globe.'

FREYIA *sung*.

'That shouldst thou have, though 'twere of gold,
And that, though 'twere of silver, hold.'
Away flew Loke; the wing'd robe sounds,
Ere he has left the Asgard grounds,
And ere he has reached the Jotunheim bounds.
High on a mound in haughty state
Thrym the King of the Thursi sate;

[1] Lithgow, the Scottish traveller, mentions maces as used by the English at the siege of Newcastle, in 1646, of which he gives a very curious account.

For his dogs he was twisting collars of gold,
And trimming the manes of his coursers bold.

THRYM *sung.*

'How fare the Asi? the Alfi how?
Why com'st thou alone to Jotunheim now?'

LOKE *sung.*

'Ill fare the Asi; the Alfi mourn;
Thor's hammer from him thou hast torn.'

THRYM *sung.*

'I have the Thunderer's hammer bound,
Fathoms eight beneath the ground;
With it shall no one homeward tread,
Till he bring me Freyia to share my bed.'
Away flew Loke; the wing'd robe sounds,
Ere he has left the Jotunheim bounds,
And ere he has reach'd the Asgard grounds.
At Midgard Thor met crafty Loke,
And this the first word that he spoke;
'Have you your errand and labour done?
Tell from aloft the course, you run.
For setting oft the story fails,
And lying oft the lie prevails.'

LOKE *sung.*

'My labor is past, mine errand I bring;
Thrym has thine hammer, the giant king;
With it shall no one homeward tread,
Till he bear him Freyia to share his bed.'
Their way to lovely Freyia they took,
And this the first word that he spoke;
'Now, Freyia, busk, as a blooming bride;
Together, we must, to Jotunheim ride.'
Wrath waxed Freyia with ireful look;
All Asgard's hall with wonder shook;
Her great bright necklace started wide.
'Well may ye call me a wanton bride,
If I with ye to Jotunheim ride.'
The Asi did all to council crowd,
The Asiniæ all talk'd fast and loud;
This they debated, and this they sought,
How the hammer of Thor should home be brought.
Up then and spoke Heimdallar free,
Like the Vani, wise was he;

'Now busk me Thor as a bride so fair;
Let him that great bright necklace wear;
Round him let ring the spousal keys,
And a maiden kirtle hang to his knees,
And on his bosom jewels rare;
And high and quaintly braid his hair.'
Wrath waxed Thor with godlike pride;
'Well may the Asi me deride,
If I let me be dight as a blooming bride.'
Then up spoke Loke, Laufeyia's son;
'Now hush thee, Thor; this must be done
The giants will strait in Asgard reign:
If thou thine hammer dost not regain.'
Then busk'd they Thor as a bride so fair,
And the great bright necklace gave him to wear;
Round him let ring the spousal keys,
And a maiden kirtle hang to his knees,
And on his bosom jewels rare;
And high and quaintly braided his hair.
Up then arose the crafty Loke,
Laufeyia's son, and thus he spoke;
'A servant I thy steps will tend,
Together we must to Jotunheim wend.'
Now home the goats together hie;
Yoked to the axle they swiftly fly.
The mountains shook, the earth burn'd red,
As Odin's son to Jotunheim sped.
Then Thrym the king of the Thursi said;
'Giants, stand up; let the seats be spread:
Bring Freyia Niorder's daughter down
To share my bed from Noatun.
With horns all gilt each cool-black beast
Is led to deck the giant's feast;
Large wealth and jewels have I stored;
I lack but Freyia to grace my board.'
Betimes at evening they approach'd,
And the mantling ale the giants broach'd.
The spouse of Sisia ate alone
Eight salmons, and an ox full grown,
And all the cates, on which women feed;
And drank three firkins of sparkling mead.
Then Thrym the king of the Thursi said;

'Where have ye beheld such a hungry maid?
Ne'er saw I bride so keenly feed,
Nor drink so deep of the sparkling mead.'
Then forward lent the crafty Loke,
And thus the giant he bespoke:
'Nought has she eat for eight long nights,
So did she long for the nuptial rites.'
He stoop'd beneath her veil to kiss,
But he started the length of the hall, I wiss.
'Why are the looks of Freyia so dire?
It seems, as her eyeballs glisten'd with fire.'
Then forward lent the craft Loke,
And thus the giant he bespoke;
'Nought has she slept for eight long nights,
So did she long for the nuptial rites.'
Then in the giant's sister came,
Who dared a bridal gift to claim;
'Those rings of gold from thee I crave.
If thou wilt all my fondness have,
All my love and fondness have.'
Then Thrym the king of the Thursi said;
'Bear in the hammer to plight the maid;
Upon her lap the bruizer lay,
And firmly plight our hands and fay.'[1]
The thunderer's soul smiled in his breast,
When the hammer hard on his lap was placed;
Thrym first the king of the Thursi he slew,
And slaughter'd all the giant crew.
He slew that giant's sister old,
Who pray'd for bridal gifts so bold.
Instead of money and rings, I wot,
The hammer's bruises were her lot,
Thus Odin's son his hammer got."

[1] *Faith.*

Vol. i. p. 1–8.

In this little tale, the genius of the rude people, for whom it was composed, may easily be recognised. We were very much amused with the brutal stupidity of the giant, a quality which seems always to have been an attribute of the sons of Anak, with the rival obtuseness of intellect displayed by the godlike Thor, who, like Ajax, seems to have

" worn his brains in his belly, and his guts in his head ; " and above all, with the insinuating address of the crafty Loke, who devised such marvellous good apologies for the circumstances in the bride's conduct, which excited poor Thrym's astonishment. The whole is a very curious specimen of the Northern romance. The notes upon it, and indeed throughout, display an intimate acquaintance with Scandinavian lore, and lead us to expect with anxiety a promised dissertation upon the ancient history and literature of Iceland.

The other translations are less generally interesting than those from the Icelandic. There is, however, one poem from the Danish, which we transcribe as an instance how very closely the ancient popular ballad of that country corresponds with our own. It is said to have been taken down in the 17th century from oral recitation, and that the old people at Hoybye then pointed out the scene of the disastrous event, and the hill upon which divine service was performed, till the Pope recalled the interdiction.

" Sir Ebba lett bigg a bower so tall,
As still each native knows,
There sing the small thrush and the nightingale,
Two damsels within it repose.

Sir Ebba he must to Iceland go
To bear his lord's behest ;
That bower, I ween, his daughters two
Will find no place of rest.

Sir Bonda and Sir Schinnild there
Leagued with their mother came,
To harm Sir Ebba's daughters fair,
And work them scath and shame.

The younger brother trembled sore
To work the damsels' shame,
'Come Sir Ebba in peace to his native shore,
He venges his daughters' fame.'

Then pale and wan grew his mother's face,
And savage wax'd her heart.
'Thou bear'st not the soul of thy father's race
But play'st a coward's part.

There's none within to check your might
Beside two varlets small;
And, were they both in iron dight,
They must before you fall.'

Early in the morning
They whet the shining spear;
At the close of evening
Before the bower appear.

Under the lofty chamber's tier
In rush'd the knights amain;
They ask no leave, they know no fear,
But fast the chamber gain.

Up then awoke those ladies fair
To guard their maiden pride;
Sir Bonda and Sir Schinnild there
Lay by their snowy side.

The damsels wept full bitterly
With many a maiden tear;
And pray'd them for their modesty
To dread their father dear.

Up rose the knights, and went forth, ere
Day lit the mountain's side;
They thank'd for what they gain'd by fear,
But dared not longer bide.

The younger sister wailed soon,
For she fell first to shame;
'Let us sink with a stone in the billows down,
And bury our blighted fame.'

The elder sister answer'd strait;
'Nay, gentle sister, nay,
Our sire from Iceland we'll await;
He'll venge us, if he may.'

It was the good Sir Ebba there,
From Iceland home he came;
To meet him both his daughters fair
All weeping went with shame.

'Now welcome, welcome, father dear;
So sore for you we cried;
Sir Bonda and Sir Schinnild here
Have stained our maiden pride.'

Sir Ebba's heart wax'd sore with wo,
To hear their mournful plight;
And, 'Ill to Iceland did I go;
Now come the deadly fight!'

'You must not for our ravish'd fame
Bear helm and weapons keen;
We will by craft avenge our shame,
Though reft of honor sheen.'

It falls upon a Christmas night,
To mass the people hies;
Betimes to whet their daggers bright
Sir Ebba's daughters rise.

Now shall Sir Ebba's daughters do
A deed of scath, I ween;
But they must not to the altar go
Without their weapons keen.

Lady Metelill smiled, and a glowing hue
Gleam'd under her rosy skin;
And, 'Stand ye up, like ladies true!
Let the brides of my children in!

Sir Bonda and Sir Schinnild there
To join the mass had sped;
And Trunda young, and Zenild fair,
Did fast behind them tread.

North within the armory bright
Young Trunda drew her blade;
South before the altar's light
Sir Bonda's fallen dead.

South beside the altar's ledge
Fair Zenild drew her knife;
North upon the grunsel edge
Sir Schinnild lost his life.

'Here stand we now as widows two,
For neither is now a maid;
And, lady, take your children two
To eat with salt and bread!'

Seven winters o'er that mournful place
Sad interdiction hung;
Nor rite was done, nor holy mass,
Nor funeral anthem sung.

On Helen's hill was a chapel built,
And there went woman and man;
Till the Pope absolved the church from guilt,
And loosed the fatal ban."—Vol. i. p. 22–28.

In this curious specimen of the Northern ballad the traces of a very rude age may be discovered. The nature of the vengeance which Lady Metelill stimulates her sons to take upon the defenceless daughters of Sir Ebba, and the exulting insults with which she receives them at the church, are circumstances to be referred to a remote period of antiquity, and almost a savage state of manners. But we were most struck with its extreme resemblance, in style and structure, to the old ballads of our own country, which has been very dexterously preserved by the translator. We hope Mr Herbert will not confine his future researches to the Icelandic poetry, but will extend them to the popu-

lar poetry of Scandinavia, which we cannot help thinking is the real source of many of the tales of our minstrels. That there was a ready intercourse between the Northern romancers, and their brethren of the South, is evident from the titles of many of the MSS. which Wanley enumerates in his catalogue, as, for example, Sagun af Kerla Magnuse og Koppum Hans, *i. e.* the History of Charlemagne, and his Paladins; Sagan af Ivant Einglands Kappe, that is, the Adventures of Sir Ywain, a Champion of the Round Table, and others, whose titles obviously denote an English or French original. But on the other hand, we suspect that our stock of popular poetry, and even that of the Anglo-Normans, was much enriched by the Northern traditions. Ugger, or Ogier the Dane, as he is called by the French romancers, however he came to be accounted one of Charlemagne's Paladins, has evidently derived his original renown from some Northern saga. In King Lear, among other scraps of old songs quoted by Edgar, in his assumed madness, we have this fragment:—

> "Child Rowland to the dark tower came,
> - - - - - - - - - - -
> The word was still fee faw fum,
> I smell the blood of a Christian man."

The ballad or romance to which this quotation belongs, is to be found in the Kæmpe Visier, a Danish collection of ancient popular poetry, which we would beg leave to recommend particularly to the learned translator of Sir Ebba. Proud Ellen Lyle had been carried off by a sort of sea-monster or demon, called Rosmer; and, like Chrystalline la Curieuse, in Count Hamilton's tales, was im-

mured by him in an enchanted dwelling. Her brother, Rowland, having traversed the seas in quest of her, at length arrives at the place of her confinement, and she conceals him to prevent his being put to death by Rosmer. When that demon arrives, he greets his affrighted spouse with the two last lines of gigantic ejaculation—

> "Fee faw fum!
> I smell the blood of a Christian man."

This curious old ballad has been lately translated by Mr Robert Jamieson of Riga, and published in a collection of Scottish ballads, with one or two others, which tend strongly to prove, that much of our popular minstrelsy was of Danish, at least of Scandinavian origin.

We have been so copious in our extracts from the Northern Poems, that we have little time to notice the others. Mr Herbert, from the formation of his style, seems to succeed best in those which he takes from the German. There is a very good translation of the Blandiné and Lenardo of Bürger, which is impressive, although strongly marked with the taste for outrageous sensibility, which disgraces most German poetry. The story is that of Tancred and Sigismunda; but Bürger, though he borrowed liberally, and without acknowledgment, from the English authors,[1] was unable to reach the manly vigour of Dryden, and therefore

[1] Witness his generously adopting Bishop Percy's beautiful ballad of the Child of Elle; and having bestowed upon fair Ellen and her lover, the sounding names of Ritter Karl von Eichenhorst, and Fraulein Gertrude von Hochburg, his very gravely calling it an ancient German Tale.

balladized the old tale as he found it in Boccacio. We are surprised to find, that some of our brother reviewers, upon the slight foundation of a verse or two in this translation, have taxed Mr Herbert with favouring revolutionary and levelling opinions. We should think it difficult to read far in his book, without seeing traces of very opposite politics, and would be more apt to number this ingenious poet with a party who must be allowed to possess a large share of literary merit, and of whom a professed dislike to innovation has been the leading and distinguishing principle.

In the translations from the Spanish and Italian, we are chiefly displeased with a want of pliability, as it were, in Mr Herbert's language. It seems as if he had laboured among the rugged rhymes of the Scalds, until his style had become too rigid for transfusing the elegance and melody of the Southern poetry.

The original poetry with which these translations are interspersed, displays no peculiar vigour of imagination. Indeed, the author has in general chosen subjects which have been too frequently the theme of the Muses to admit of any great novelty in the mode of treating them. Thus, we have an Ode to Despair, in the first volume, very well executed for that kind of composition; but we have now seen so many of these addresses to personified passions, and are so much accustomed to the routine of their being supplied with appropriate amusements, and a suitable pedigree, that a disagreeable and unimpressive similarity is their principal characteristic.

Yet there are several instances of great felicity of expression in these original pieces; and we think the author excels in that very difficult class of which love is the subject. There is an elegance in some of these little pieces, which deserts him in his more sublime efforts; and, very contrary to the meretricious effusions of contemporary bards, we remark, with pleasure, that the passion which his verses express, is that pure and virtuous affection which sublimes and refines all that is connected with it. The piece, upon the whole, which we are inclined to consider as decidedly unworthy of the others, is a ballad called William Lambert—a Tale, which the author seems to have suspected was too simple for publication. But, however true and pleasing the incident which it contains, the account of a boy relieved from beggary by the liberality of the Lady Margaret, and who prefers being a gardener to going to sea, cannot be considered as generally interesting. In some of the verses, the author has in fact slid into that style of tawdry and affected simplicity, which we should have thought that he who has studied popular poetry upon the manliest models, would, of all persons, have been least likely to imitate. The choice of the orphan to stay with Lady Margaret is, for example, thus expressed.

"The little boy he hied him in,
And busk'd him in the hall;
And soon he was all trimly dight,
And waxed stout withal.

'A boon (he cried), fair Lady mine!
O send me not to sea!

For thou must be mine only friend,
And I must bide with thee.

'O let me here thy garden tend,
Hard by this pleasant bower;
Here deck the lawn with careful hand,
And rear each scented flower:

The soft primrose, the violet blue,
The glowing celandine;
And cuckoo-buds, and sorrel pale,
And luscious sweet woodbine.'"—Vol. ii. p. 86.

This is not genuine ballad poetry, which Mr Herbert can write when he pleases; but that spurious kind, which trickles through the Sir Eldreds of the Bower,[1] and other legendary ditties of the eighteenth century. It is the very last refuge of those who can do nothing better in the shape of verse; and a man of genius should disdain to invade the province of these dawdling rhymers.

[1] [Sir Eldred was an early performance of Mrs Hannah More.]

ARTICLE VI.

EVANS'S OLD BALLADS.

[*Quarterly Review, May*, 1810. *On "Old Ballads, Historical," &c. By* THOMAS EVANS. *Revised, &c. by his Son,* R. H. EVANS. 4 *vols.: And "Vocal Poetry, or a select Collection of English Songs. To which is prefixed, an Essay on Song Writing." By* JOHN AIKIN, M.D.]

WE class these publications together, as being a species which characteristic simplicity and the powerful union of music render generally acceptable, as well to high-born dames in bower and hall, as to "the free maids that weave their thread with bones."

The reviver of minstrel poetry in Scotland was the venerable Bishop of Dromore, who, in 1765, published his elegant collection of heroic ballads, songs, and pieces of early poets, under the title of Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. The plan of the work was adjusted in concert with Mr Shenstone, but we own we cannot regret that the execution of it devolved upon Dr Percy alone. It was divided into three volumes, each forming a distinct series of ancient poetry, selected with

classical elegance, and interspersed with modern imitations and specimens of lyric composition. The various subdivisions of the work were prefaced by critical and curious dissertations upon subjects connected with or tending to elucidate the ancient ballads which they preceded. The arrangement of the specimens was so managed as to exhibit the gradation of language, the progress of popular opinions, the manners and customs of former ages, and the obscure passages of our earlier classical poets. The plan of this publication was eminently calculated to remove the principal obstacle which the taste of the period offered to its success. To bring Philosophy from heaven to dwell among men, it was necessary to divest her of some of her more awful attributes, to array her doctrines in familiar language, and render them evident by popular illustration. But Dr Percy had a different course to pursue when conducting Legendary Lore from stalls and kitchens and cottage chimneys, or, at best, from the dust, moths, and mould of the Pepysian or Pearsonian collections, to be an inmate of the drawingroom and the study. The attempt was entirely new, and the difficulties attending it arose from the fastidious taste of an age which was accustomed to receive nothing under the denomination of poetry, unrecommended by flowing numbers and elaborate expression. To soften these difficulties, Dr Percy availed himself, to a considerable extent, of his own poetical talent, to alter, amend, and decorate the rude popular rhymes, which, if given to the public with scrupulous fidelity, would probably have been

rejected with contempt and disgust. It was not then, so much the question whether an ancient poem was authentic according to the letter, as whether it was or could be rendered worth reading; and it might be said of Dr Percy's labours as an editor, *nihil quod tetigit non ornavit.* It may be asked by the severer antiquary of the present day, why an editor, thinking it necessary to introduce such alterations, in order to bring forth a new, beautiful, and interesting sense from a meagre or corrupted original, did not, in good faith to his readers, acquaint them with the liberties he had taken, and make them judge whether in so doing he transgressed his limits. We answer, that unquestionably such would be the express duty of a modern editor, but such were not the rules of the service when Dr Percy first opened the campaign. His avowal of alterations, additions, and conjectural emendations, at the bottom of each page, would have only led his readers to infer that his originals were good for nothing; not to mention that a great many of those additions derived their principal merit from being supposed ancient. In short, a certain conformity with the general taste was necessary to introduce a relish for the subject; accuracy and minute investigation of the original state of the ballads was likely to follow, and did follow so soon as the public ear had been won by the more elegant and polished edition of Dr Percy. It had been well if the industrious Ritson, and other minute and accurate labourers in the mine of antiquity, had contented themselves with exhibiting specimens of the ore in

its original state, without abusing the artist who had made the vein worth digging, by showing to what its produce might be refined.

The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry seem, shortly after their publication, to have exceeded even the expectation of the editor in giving a strong and determined impulse to public taste and curiosity, the effects of which have only abated within these very few years. Mr Thomas Evans, bookseller, was the first who endeavoured to avail himself of the taste which they had excited, by publishing the collection of which his son has now given us a second edition.

This publication, although intended as a supplement to the Reliques of Ancient Poetry, cannot be considered as continued upon the same plan. There are no dissertations prefixed, and the preliminary matter which prefaces the ballads is but meagre. The ballads themselves are chiefly such as the more cautious taste of Dr Percy had left unpublished, either because their rude structure was incapable of decoration, or because they were so well known as to render decoration unadvisable. The principal source from which they were taken is a small publication in three volumes, 12mo, entitled, *A Collection of old Ballads, corrected from the best and most ancient copies extant, with Introductions, historical, critical, or humorous: illustrated with copper-plates.* It is now, we believe, extremely rare, and sells at a price very disproportionate to its size. The volumes appeared separately, and from the edition now before us, the first seems to have been reprinted in 1723, the second in the

same year, the third in 1725. The editor was an enthusiast in the cause of old poetry, and selected his matter without much regard to decency, as will appear from the following singular preface to one or two indelicate pieces of humour. "One of the greatest complaints made by the ladies against the first volume of our collection, and indeed the only one which has reached my ears, is the want of merry songs. I believe I may give a pretty good guess at what they call mirth in such pieces as these, and shall endeavour to satisfy them, though I have very little room to spare." From this fountain the late Mr Evans seems to have drawn such supplies as it afforded. Most of his historical ballads are taken from it, and many of the tales of Robin Hood, although he probably used some of the Garlands respecting the hero of Sherwood, in correcting and completing that series. In the present edition these are materially improved by comparison with and reference to the black-letter copies.

But although Mr Evans did not imitate Dr Percy in the more learned and critical department of his labour, and although he stands acquitted of having taken the same license with originals of acknowledged antiquity; yet he not only followed his plan in admitting the compositions of modern authors in imitation of the ancient ballad, but the third and fourth volumes of his works contain also some pieces presented as ancient, which, from the orthography, language, sentiments, and numbers, are evidently spurious. These ballads, which we have always considered as the most valuable part of Mr Evans's collection, as far as poetry is concern-

ed, are Bishop Thurston and the King of Scots, Battle of Cuton Moor, Murder of Prince Arthur, Prince Edward and Adam Gordon, Cumner Hall, Arabella Stuart, Anna Bullen, The Lady and the Palmer, The Fair Maniac, The Bridal Bed, The Lordling Peasant, The Red-Cross Knight, The Wandering Maid, The Triumph of Death, Julia, The Fruits of Jealousy, The Death of Allen. These seventeen ballads, which we believe have never been published except in this work, have a sort of family resemblance which indicates a common parent. The antique colouring in all of them originally consisted in the adoption of a species of orthography embarrassed with an unusual number of letters, and regularly *exchaungynge* the *i* for the *y* in the participle, which is, for further dignity, graced uniformly with a final *e*. These injudicious marks of imitation, which can no more render a modern ballad like an ancient than a decoction of walnuts can convert the features of an European into those of an Asiatic, are rejected by the present editor, Mr R. H. Evans, who thus leads us to infer that he does not consider the poems we have enumerated as authentic remnants of antiquity. We wish he had favoured us with some light upon their history. They appear to us to be the work of an author endowed with no small portion of poetical genius. Many marks of haste appear in the composition, which the writer probably considered as of little importance, since he never intended to be responsible for his offspring. But there are touches of great beauty of description, and an expression of sentiment peculiarly soft, simple, and

affecting in almost every one of these neglected legends. The knowledge of history, too, which they display, argues that the author mingled the pursuits of the antiquary with those of the poet, and was enabled, by the information so collected, to realize and verify the conceptions of his imagination when employed upon the actual manners and customs of the feudal ages. To vindicate our eulogium, we beg leave to quote a few stanzas from the tale entitled the Bridal Bed.

" It was a maid of low degree
Sat on her true-love's grave,
And with her tears most piteously
The green turf she did lave;
She strew'd the flow'rs, she pluck'd the weed,
And show'rs of tears she shed:
'Sweet turf,' she cried, 'by fate decreed
To be my bridal bed!

'I've set thee, flow'r, for that the flow'r
Of manhood lieth here;
And water'd thee with plenteous show'r
Of many a briny tear.'
And still she cried, 'Oh stay, my love,
My true-love, stay for me;
Stay till I've deck'd my bridal bed,
And I will follow thee.

'Sweet turf, thy green more green appears,
Tears make thy verdure grow,
Then still I'll water thee with tears,
That thus profusely flow.
Oh stay for me, departed youth,
My true love, stay for me;
Stay till I've deck'd my bridal bed,
And I will follow thee.

'This is the flow'ry wreath he wove,
To deck his bride, dear youth!
And this the ring with which my love

To me did plight his troth;
And this dear ring I was to keep,
And with it to be wed—
But here, alas! I sigh and weep
To deck my bridal bed.'

A blithsome knight came riding by,
And, as the bright moon shone,
He saw her on the green turf lie,
And heard her piteous moan;
For loud she cried, 'Oh stay, my love,
My true-love stay for me;
Stay till I've deck'd my bridal bed,
And I will follow thee.'

'Be calm, fair maid,' the knight replied,
'Thou art too young to die;
But go with me, and be my bride,
And leave the old to sigh.'
But still she cried, 'Oh stay, my love,
My true-love stay for me;
Stay till I've deck'd my bridal bed,
And I will follow thee.'

'Oh leave,' he cried, 'this grief so cold,
And leave this dread despair,
And thou shalt flaunt in robes of gold,
A lady rich and fair:
Thou shalt have halls and castles fair:
And when, sweet maid, we wed,
O thou shalt have much costly gear,
To deck thy bridal bed.'

'Oh hold thy peace, thou cruel knight,
Nor urge me to despair;
With thee my troth I will not plight,
For all thy proffers fair:
But I will die with my own true-love—
My true-love, stay for me;
Stay till I've deck'd my bridal bed,
And I will follow thee.

'Thy halls and castles I despise,
This turf is all I crave;

For all my hopes, and all my joys,
Lie buried in this grave:
I want not gold, nor costly gear,
Now my true-love is dead;
But with fading flower and scalding tear
I deck my bridal bed.'

'Oh! be my bride, thou weeping fair,
Oh! be my bride, I pray;
And I will build a tomb most rare,
Where thy true-love shall *lay*:'
But still with tears she cried, 'My love,
My true-love, stay for me;
Stay till I've deck'd my bridal bed,
And I will follow thee.

'My love needs not a tomb so rare,
In a green grave we will lie;
Our carved works—these flow'rets fair,
Our canopy—the sky.
Now go, sir knight, now go thy ways—
Full soon I shall be dead—
And then return, in some few days,
And deck my bridal bed.

'And strew the flower, and pluck the thorn,
And cleanse the turf, I pray;
So may some hand thy turf adorn,
When thou in grave shall *lay*.
But stay, oh thou whom dear I love,
My true-love, stay for me;
Stay till I have deck'd my bridal bed,
And I will follow thee.'"

This dirge is certainly not ancient; but it is no treason to say it is better than if it were. We cannot suppress a suspicion that these legendary pieces flowed from the pen of a poet to whom neither his own nor this generation has been altogether just. We mean William Julius Mickle, the translator of the Lusiad. His Sir Martyn, written

in imitation of Spenser's manner, with much of the copious and luxuriant description of his original, shows his attachment to the study of the ancient poetry of Britain; and his two beautiful ballads, entitled Hengist and Mey, and the Sorceress, have the same harmony of versification, the same simple and affecting turn of expression, with the imitations of the heroic legend which we are now considering. If Mr Mickle should have been a friend of the elder Mr Evans, as we believe, we consider that circumstance, joined to internal evidence, as sufficient to ascertain his property in the ballads in question.

We have also to complain, that in publishing some other imitations of the ancient ballads, the authors' names have been withheld where, perhaps, they were more easily attainable than in the case just stated. Thus the ingenious Mr Henry Mackenzie (author of the Man of Feeling) is well known to have written the beautiful Scottish ballad entitled Kenneth; and Michael Bruce that of Sir John Ross. The ballad of the Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heughs is also known to have been, in a very great measure, the production of the Rev. Mr Lambe, late vicar of Norham, and editor of the Battle of Flodden-field. It is founded upon a prevailing tradition in Bamboroughshire, and the author has interwoven a few stanzas of the original song concerning it, which begins,

"Bambro' castle's built full high,
It's built of marble stone,
And lang lang may the lady wait
For her father's coming home," &c.

In revising his father's publication, Mr R. Evans has, with great judgment, discarded a number of sing-song imitations of the ancient ballad by Jerningham, Robinson, and other flimsy pretenders, who, seduced by the apparent ease of the task, ventured to lay their hand upon the minstrel lyre. For a different reason, he has omitted the contributions which his father levied upon Goldsmith, Gray, and other eminent moderns, whose works are in every one's hand. By this exclusion he has made room for a selection of genuine ancient poetry, compiled, by his own industry, from the hoarded treasures of black-letter ballads.

It is no disgrace to Mr Evans, that these veterans, whom he has introduced to recruit his diminished ranks, are, generally speaking, more respectable for their antiquity than for any thing else. Percy, Ellis, and other editors of taste and genius, had long ago anticipated Mr Evans's labours, and left him but the refuse of the market. Some of the ballads, indeed, exhibit such wretched doggrel as serves, more than the dissertations of a thousand Ritsons, to degrade the character of our ancient song-enditers.

The "Warning to Youth," for example, "shewing the lewd life of a merchant's sonne of London, and the misery that at the last he sustained by his notoriousnesse," might, notwithstanding the valuable moral attached to it, have been left, without injury to the public, to "dust and mere oblivion." Had we known Mr Evans's curiosity in such matters, we could have supplied him with as much stale poetry of a similar description as would have made his four volumes twenty.

But although Mr Evans's love of antiquity has occasionally seduced him into publishing what is no otherwise valuable than as it is old, a prejudice by which all antiquarian editors are influenced in a greater or less degree, we have to applaud the diligence with which he has traced and recovered some beautiful and some curious pieces of poetry, which possess intrinsic merit and interest. Among the former we distinguish the address to a disappointed, or rather a forsaken lover, which has, we think, a turn of passion that is new, upon a very thread-bare subject.

" I am so farre from pittying thee,
That wear'st a branch of willow tree,
That I do envie thee and all,
That once were high and got a fall:
O willow, willow, willow tree,
I would thou didst belong to mee.

That wearing willow doth imply,
That thou art happier farre than I,
For once thou wert where thou wouldst be,
Though now thou wear'st the willow tree:
O willow, willow, sweete willow,
Let me once lie upon her pillow.

I doe defie both boughe and roote,
And all the fiends of hell to boote;
One houre of paradised joye,
Makes purgatorie seeme a toye:
O willow, willow, doe thy worst,
Thou canst not make me more accurst.

I have spent all my golden time,
In writing many a loving rime,
I have consumed all my youth
In vowing of my faith and trueth:
O willow, willow, willow tree,
Yet can I not beleeved bee.

And now alas it is too late,
Gray hares, the messengers of fate,
Bid me to set my heart at rest,
For beautie loveth young men best:
O willow, willow, I must die,
Thy servant's happier farre then I."

The "Symptoms of Love," p. 246, is another very pretty song, and there are many scattered through the volumes which have considerable elegance of expression, or a quaintness rendered venerable by antiquity, and which, like the grotesque carving on a gothic niche, has a pleasing effect, though irreconcilable with the strict rules of taste.

These praises apply chiefly to the songs and minor pieces of lyrical poetry. The only ancient ballad, actually connected with history and manners, which Mr Evans's labours have presented to us for the first time, is the murder of the Wests, by the sons of the Lord Darsy. Its chief merit is its curiosity.

Among the poems which are deservedly inserted, we cannot help remarking that entitled "The Felon Sow and the Freeres of Richmond," as belonging to a class of compositions which has been but lightly discussed by our antiquaries—we mean the burlesque romance of the middle ages, with which, doubtless, the minstrel and tale-teller relieved the uniformity of their heroic ditties. In these ludicrous poems, which are a kind of parody upon the metrical romances, churchmen and peasants are introduced imitating the knightly pastimes of chivalry; and their awkward mishaps and absurd blunders must have been matter of excellent mirth to the doughty knights and gallant barons.

who listened to the tale. Thus, in the case before us, the felon sow was the undisturbed tenant of the woods of Rokeby, and the romantic banks of the Greta—her size and ferocity are described with great emphasis. The Lord of Rokeby, a man of humour, gave her to the Friars of Richmond, provided they could catch her. Friar Middleton sets off with two wight men at musters to possess himself of the prize. They compel the sow to take refuge in a limekiln, where they hamper her with cords from above; but the felon sow breaks forth upon them, routs the escort, reduces the friar to conjuration out of his breviary, and at length to betake himself to a tree. Friar Middleton and his companions return in evil plight to the convent; and the warden, to redeem the disgrace, hires two bold men-at-arms to follow forth the adventure of the sow. They enter into solemn indenture to "bide and fight" to the death; and the warden, on his part, becomes bound to say masses for their souls if they miscarry. The men-at-arms, more successful than Friar Middleton, vanquish and kill the felon sow; and the convent sing "Te Deum" merrily, "that they had won the beast of price."

> "If you will any more of this,
> In the Friery at Richmond written it is,
> In parchment good and fine,
> How Freer Middleton so hende,
> At Greta Bridge conjured a fiend,
> In likenesse of a swine."[1]

This tale, which possesses some portion of Cervantic humour, resembles the "Tournament of Tot-

[1] [See the verses at length, in the Notes to the fifth canto of the poem of *Rokeby*.]

tenham" (See Percy's Reliques, vol. ii.), in which the peasants of a village are introduced imitating all the solemnities of a tournament, and battering each other's heads with flails, as knights did with long swords and maces. Another remarkable example of this class of comic romances is entitled, "The Hunting of the Hare." A yeoman, having found a hare sitting in the common field of a village, announces his discovery to the inhabitants. The peasants, resolving to course her, bring to the spot their great yard-dogs and mastiffs, "with short shanks, and never a tail." The confusion and disarray which follow the congregating of this ill-assorted pack is described with great humour. The ban-dogs, more addicted to war than sport, fall foul of each other—their masters are gradually involved in the quarrel—and poor puss steals away, leaving her enemies engaged in a grand scene of worrying and wrangling. This poem has never, we believe, been printed. We could add largely to these examples, and show that low romance formed a distinct style of composition during the middle ages; but we have already exceeded our bounds, and must dismiss Mr Evans's publication, which, always curious, has been greatly improved by his personal taste and labour.

The next articles in our title, which are allied in subject to the Collection of Ballads, are two editions of the same work—Dr Aikin's well-known collection of songs, with the preliminary essay. Mr Evans, it seems from his preface, considered Dr Aikin to have given up any intention of reprinting his collection.

"The many years which have elapsed since the publication of the last edition, seemed to leave no hope that Dr Aikin could be prevailed on to gratify the public by a revision and enlargement of his work. He had declined the task in the prime and vigour of life; and he might now think it unbecoming his years, to engage in a republication of these *nugæ canoræ*. *Turpe senilis amor*, the Doctor might exclaim; and though he might be pleased to see his volume ranged by the side of those of Percy, Ellis, and some other similar publications, yet he has abandoned the friendly office of revision to other hands."

Mr Evans has, however, reckoned without his host in this matter, and we are sorry that he did not take some more certain means of ascertaining the Doctor's intentions, considering his own labours; for we are not to suppose, that one who is an editor, as well as a bookseller, would have so far neglected the *comitas* due to a brother author, as to publish against him a rival edition of his own work. Dr Aikin prefaces his edition with the following account of his motives:—

"As enquiries were still, from time to time, made after it among the booksellers, the editor was asked the question whether he had any intention of reprinting it; accompanied with the intimation, that, as the copy-right was expired, should he decline the business, others would be ready to undertake it. Conscious that the essays were the juvenile attempts of one whose taste was by no means matured, and whose critical knowledge was circumscribed within narrow limits, the editor was unwilling that his book should again be given to the public with all its imperfections on its head. He was obliged, therefore, to declare, that if it were reprinted at all, it should be with many material alterations, corresponding to his own change of taste and opinion in various points during so long an interval.

"Under these almost compulsory circumstances, although he perhaps should not now have chosen for the first time to appear as the collector of productions, the general strain of which is more suitable to an earlier period of life, yet he thought he might, without impropriety, avail himself of the opportunity of making a new and much more extensive selection of compositions, which will not cease to

be favourites with the lovers of elegant poetry, whatever be the vicissitudes of general taste."

In the singular predicament of reviewing two rival editions of the same work, and without pretending to give a decision against Mr Evans, although we think he has treated Dr Aikin with somewhat less attention than his age, situation, and talents perhaps demanded, we cannot regret that we are possessed of both editions of the book, and trust, that (as the old song runs) "the world's wide and there's room for them all." We are particularly glad to have an opportunity of comparing Dr Aikin's original ideas upon the subject of song writing with those which he has since adopted. His four essays upon songs in general, upon ballads and pastoral songs, upon passionate and descriptive songs, upon ingenious and witty songs, are now blended into one general essay; but we love the classical turn of these little discourses so well, that we are glad they are preserved in their original state. Such directions and rules of composition, whether in their separate and detailed, or in their new moulded shape, were never more necessary than at the present day. The marriage between harmony and "immortal verse" has, like fashionable wedlock, frequently made some very ill-matched pairs; and we suspect that poetry must soon sue for a separate maintenance. The ladies, who ought, in common charity, to feel for her situation, are those who aggravate her hardships; for it is rare to hear a fair songstress utter the words of the song which she quavers forth. But where taste and feeling for poetry happen to be united with a sweet

and flexible voice, it is scarcely possible to mention a higher power of imparting and heightening social pleasure. We have heard Dr Aikin's simple ballad, "It was a winter's evening, and fast came down the snow," set by Dr Clarke, sung with such beautiful simplicity as to draw tears even from the eyes of reviewers. But the consideration of modern song opens to the critic a stronger ground of complaint, from the degeneracy of the compositions which have been popular under that name. Surely it is time to make some stand against the deluge of nonsense and indecency which has of late supplanted, in the higher circles, the songs of our best poets. We say nothing of the "Nancies of the hills and vales." Peace to all such!—let the miller and apprentice have their ballad, and have it such as they can understand. Let the seaman have his "tight main-decker," and the countess her tinseled canzonet. But when we hear words which convey to every man, and we fear to most of the women in society, a sense beyond what effrontery itself would venture to avow; when we hear such flowing from the lips, or addressed to the ears of unsuspecting innocence, we can barely suppress our execration. This elegant collection presents, to those who admire music, a means of escaping from the too general pollution, and of indulging a pleasure which we are taught to regard as equally advantageous to the heart, taste, and understanding. Both editions are considerably enlarged by various songs extracted from the best modern poets, and in either shape the work maintains its right to rank as one of the most classical collections of songs in any language.

ARTICLE VII.

MOLIÈRE.

[*From the Foreign Quarterly Review for* 1828, *on* AUGER's Edition of Molière, 9 *vols.* 8*vo*, *Paris*, 1819-27; *and the* "*Historie de la Vie et des Ouvrages de* Molière. *Par.* J. TASCHEREAU, *Paris*, 1825."]

IT will be universally admitted that in tragic performances nothing can be more distinctly different than the laws which regulate the French and English stage. The dissimilarity is so great, that a native of either country, however candid or liberal, must have studied with some attention the literature of the other, to enable him, not merely to relish, but even to endure the tragedies of the neighbouring kingdom. A Parisian critic would be shocked at the representation of Hamlet *au naturel*, and the most patient spectator in a Drury Lane audience would incur some risk of dislocating his jaws with yawning, during the representation of a chef-d'œuvre of Racine or Corneille. This difference betwixt the taste of two highly civilized nations is not surprising, when we consider that the English tragedy existed a hundred years at least before the

French, and is therefore censured by our neighbours as partaking, to a certain extent, of the barbarity and grossness of the age of Queen Elizabeth. The two great tragedians of France, on the contrary, had the task of entertaining a polished and highly ceremonious court, whose judgment was at least as fastidious as it was correct, and in whose eyes a breach of etiquette was a more formidable crime than any deficiency in spirit or genius.

Thus the English stage exhibited in word and in action every "change of many coloured life," mingled the tragic with the comic, the ludicrous with the horrible, seized by storm on the applause of the half-startled, half-affrighted audience, and presented to the judgment, like Salvator's landscapes to the eye, a chaos of the wonderful, mixed with the grotesque, agitating the passions too strongly to leave time to enquire whether the rules of critical taste were not frequently violated. The French stage, on the other hand, is carefully and exactly limited by a sense of decorum, which, exercised in its rigour, may be called the tyranny of taste. It is not lawful to please, says this dramatic code, unless by observance of certain arbitrary rules, or to create a deeper and more intense interest, than a strict obedience to the precepts of Aristotle and his modern commentators will permit. The English authors have therefore preferred exhibiting striking incidents and extraordinary characters placed in violent contrast, at the risk of shocking probability; and their keenest partisans must own, that they have been often absurd, when they aimed at being sublime. The

French, on the other hand, limiting themselves in general to long dramatic dialogues, in which passion is rather analyzed than displayed, have sometimes become tedious by a display of ingenuity, where the spectator expected touches of feeling. It follows as a matter of course, that each country, partial to the merits of its own style of amusement, and struck with the faults which belong to a cast of composition so extremely different, is as severe in censuring the foreign stage, as it is indulgent in judging of its own. Two important questions arise out of this: first, whether, considering the many differences betwixt the taste both of nations and individuals, either country is entitled to condemn with acrimony the favourite authors of the other, merely because they did not hit a mark against which they never directed their arrows? and, secondly, whether there may not remain to be trodden, by some splendid genius yet to be born, some middle path, which may attain the just mean betwixt that English freedom approaching to license, and the severe system of French criticism, that sometimes cramps and subjects the spirit which it is only designed to guide or direct?

Happily for us, our present subject does not require us to prosecute an enquiry so delicate as that which we have been led to touch upon. The difference in the national tastes of France and England, so very remarkable when we compare the tragedies of the two countries, is much less conspicuous in their comic dramas; where setting aside their emancipation from the tenets of the Stagyrite, the English comic writers do, or ought to, propose

to themselves the same object with the French of the same class. As a proof of this, we may remark, that very few French tragedies have ever been translated, and of these few (the *Zaire* of Voltaire excepted) still fewer have become permanently popular, or have been reckoned stock-plays, —whereas the English authors, from the age of the great man of whom we are about to speak, down to the present day, have been in the habit of transferring to the British stage almost all the comedies which have been well received in France. How it happens, that two nations which differ so much in their estimation of the terrible or the pathetic should agree so exactly in their sense of the gay, the witty, and the humorous, is a different question, which we are not called upon to discuss very deeply. Lord Chesterfield, however, has long since remarked (with the invidious intention of silencing an honest laugh) that laughter is a vulgar convulsion, common to all men, and that a ridiculous incident, such as the member of a company attempting to sit down when he has no chair behind him, will create a louder peal of mirth, than could be excited by the most brilliant sally of wit. We go no further with his lordship than to agree, that the sense of the comic is far more general among mankind, and far less altered and modified by the artificial rules of society, than that of the pathetic; and that a hundred men of different ranks, or different countries will laugh at the same jest, when not five of them perhaps would blend their tears over the same point of sentiment. Take, for example, the Dead Ass of

Sterne, and reflect how few would join in feeling the pathos of that incident, in comparison with the numbers who would laugh in chorus till their eyes ran over at the too lively steed of the redoubtable John Gilpin. The moralist may regard this fact, either as a sign of our corrupted nature, to which the ludicrous feeling of the comic distress of a fellow-creature is more congenial than a sympathy with his actual miseries,—or as a proof of the kindness of Providence, which, placing us in a valley of sorrows, has enabled us, from our conformation, to be readily moved by such mirth-exciting circumstances as it affords, and by this propensity to counteract the depression of spirits occasioned by all that is gloomy and melancholy around us. To us it is enough to be assured, that the universal sense of the humorous renders such a complete master of comedy as Molière the property, not of that country alone which was honoured with his birth, but of the civilized world, and of England in particular, whose drama has been enriched by versions of so many of his best pieces.

As, however, we suspect that the history of this great author, the prince certainly of comic writers, is but little known to our English readers, we shall give a sketch of Molière's life, from the interesting and well-told narrative of his recent biographer, Mons. Taschereau.

Le Menteur of the Great Corneille (known to the British reader under the title of *The Liar*), which appeared in 1642, was perhaps the first approach to the more just and elevated species of comedy. It was, however, a translation from the

Spanish, and although it must be termed a comedy founded upon character, in which the whole incidents bear regularly on each other, and tend to enhance the ridicule attached to the foible of the hero, the plot has nevertheless a strong relish of the old Spanish school, which turned upon disguises, scaling ladders, dark-lanterns, and trap-doors. The comedies of *Don Bertrand de Cigaral*, and *Le Geolier de Soi-même*, composed by Thomas Corneille, are more distinctly and decidedly comedies of intrigue and bustle, similar to those borrowed from that exhaustless mine, the Spanish drama, where, generally speaking, at the expense of little save a wild imagination, the poet

> ——— "fill'd the stage with all the crowd
> Of fools pursuing, and of fools pursu'd,
> Whose inns and outs no ray of sense discloses,
> Whose deepest plot is how to break folks' noses."

We may therefore say, that, relieved occasionally by the lively absurdity of the Italian farce, the comedy of intrigue, depending for its success upon mere stage-trick and stratagem, had usurped the place of that Thalia, who was to derive her interest by the lectures which she proposed to read upon the human heart and national manners. It was then that Molière arose, to whom we can scarcely hesitate to assign the first place amongst the comic writers of any age or nation.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin was christened at Paris, 15th January, 1622. His family consisted of decent burghers, who had, for two or three generations, followed the business of manufacturers of tapestry, or dealers in that commodity. Jean Poquelin, the

father of the poet, also enjoyed the office of valet-de-chambre in the royal household. He endeavoured to bring his son up to the same business, but finding that it was totally inconsistent with the taste and temper of the young Jean-Baptiste, he placed him at the Jesuits' college of Clermont, now the college of Louis-le-Grand. Young Poquelin had scarcely terminated his course of philosophy, when, having obtained the situation of assistant and successor to his father, in his post of valet-de-chambre to the king, he was called on to attend Louis XIII. on a tour to Narbonne, which lasted nearly a year. Doubtless, the opportunities which this journey afforded him, of comparing the manners and follies of the royal court and of the city of Paris, with those which he found still existing in the provincial towns and amongst the rural noblesse, were not lost upon the poet, by whose satirical powers they were destined to be immortalized.

On his return to Paris, young Poquelin commenced the study of the law; nay, it appears probable, that he was actually admitted an advocate. But the name of Molière must be added to the long list of those who have become conspicuous for success in the fine arts, having first adopted the pursuit of them in contradiction to the will of their parents, and in whom, according to Voltaire, nature has proved stronger than education.

Instead of frequenting the courts, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin was an assiduous attendant upon such companies of players as then amused the metropolis, and at length placed himself at the head of a society of young men, who began by acting plays

for amusement, and ended by performing with a view to emolument. His parents were greatly distressed by the step he had taken. He had plunged himself into a profession which the law pronounced infamous, and nothing short of rising to the very top of it could restore his estimation in society. Whatever internal confidence of success the young Poquelin might himself feel, his chance of being extricated from the degradation to which he had subjected himself must have seemed very precarious to others; and we cannot be surprised that his relations were mortified and displeased with his conduct. To conciliate their prejudices as much as possible, he dropped the appellation of Poquelin, and assumed that of Molière, that he might not tarnish the family name. But with what indifference should we now read the name of Poquelin, had it never been conjoined with that of Molière, devised to supersede and conceal it! It appears that the liberal sentiments of the royal court left Molière in possession of his office, notwithstanding his change of profession.

From the year 1646 to 1653, it is only known that Molière travelled through France as the manager of a company of strolling players. It is said, that with the natural turn of young authors, who are more desirous to combine scenes of strong emotion than of comic situation, he attempted to produce a tragedy called *The Thebaid.* Its indifferent success disgusted him with the buskin; and, it may be observed, that in proportion as he affects, in other compositions, any thing approaching to the tragic,

his admirable facility of expression seems to abandon him, and he becomes stiff and flat.

In the year 1653, Molière's brilliant comedy of *L'Etourdi* was performed at *Lyons*, and gave a noble presage of the talents of its illustrious author. The piece is known to English readers by a translation, entitled *Sir Martin Marplot*, made originally by the celebrated Duke of Newcastle, and adapted to the stage by the pen of Dryden. The piece turns upon the schemes formed by a clever and intriguing valet to facilitate the union betwixt his master and the heroine of the scene, all of which are successively baffled and disconcerted by the bustling interference of the lover himself. The French original has infinitely the superiority of the English imitation; not only as being the original, but because the character of the luckless lover is drawn with an exquisitely finer pencil. Lélie is an inconsequential, light-headed, gentleman-like coxcomb; but Sir Martin Marplot is a fool. In the English drama, the author seems to have considered his hero as so thoroughly stupid, that he rewards the address of the intriguing domestic with the hand of the lady. The French author gave no occasion for this gross indecorum. *L'Etourdi* was followed by *Le Dépit Amoureux*, an admirable entertainment; although the French critics bestow some censure on both for a carelessness of style, to which a foreigner may profess himself indifferent. Both these performances were received with the greatest applause by numerous audiences; and as far as the approbation of provincial theatres could confer reputation, that of Molière was now established.

There was, however, a temptation, which threatened to withdraw him from the worship of Thalia. This was an offer on the part of the Prince of Conti, who had been his condisciple at college, to create Molière his secretary. He declined this, on account of his devoted attachment to his own profession, strengthened on this occasion, perhaps, by his knowledge how the place had become vacant. This, it seems, was by the death of Sarrasin (who had held the office), in consequence of *un mauvais traitement de Monseigneur le Prince de Conti;* in plain English, the prince had, with the fire-tongs, knocked down his secretary, who never recovered from the effects of the blow. It is probable that, notwithstanding the laurel chaplet worn by Molière, he had little faith in the *sic evitabile fulmen.*

This was in 1654. He continued to perambulate the provinces with his company for several years longer. In 1658 he returned to Paris; and at last, through the influence of his patron, the Prince of Conti, was introduced to Monsieur, the King's brother, and by him presented to the King and Queen. On the 24th of October, his company performed in the presence of the royal family, and he obtained the royal license to open a theatre under the title of *Troupe de Monsieur*, in opposition to, or in emulation of, the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The pieces which Molière had already composed were received with great favour; but it was not until 1659, that he commenced the honourable satirical war with folly and affectation which he waged for so many years. It was then that he produced *Les Précieuses Ridicules.*

To understand the purpose of this satirical drama, the English reader must be informed, that there existed at Paris a coterie of women of rank, who pretended to the most exalted refinement of thought, expression, and sentiment. These were waited upon and worshipped by a certain number of men of fashion and several literary characters, who used towards them, in conducting their gallant intercourse, a peculiar strain of high-flown, pedantic gallantry, like that which was formerly in fashion in England, when every maid of honour spoke the affected jargon called Euphuism. This society met in the Hôtel de Rambouillet, under the protection of the marchioness, its mistress. There were amongst them several persons of real wit and talent, a circumstance which only served to render the false taste which presided in the assembly more whimsically conspicuous. The language which the adepts of this sect piqued themselves on using, was a series of cold, far fetched, extravagant metaphors and emblems, as remote from good taste as from common sense; and adorned with flights which resembled those of Cowley and Donne in their love verses. If wit, as Dr Johnson observes of the metaphysical poets, consists in a combination of dissimilar images—a discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike—the conversation of the Hôtel de Rambouillet had more than enough of it. Their amorous intercourse was all in trope and figure; the more remote and extravagant so much the more to be applauded. The land of gallantry was graphically illustrated as a country through which the pilgrim-lover travelled, possessing him-

self successively of the village of *billets-galans*, the hamlet of *billets-doux*, and the castle of *petits soins*. The expressions of real passion are always obvious and intelligible, but this pragmatical association made love without interest or concern; their courtship was void of tenderness—their sorrow could excite no sympathy;—it was sufficient that they said what had never, they hoped, been said before. The whole language, or rather jargon of the society, was a succession of enigmas, the sense of which much resembled the Highlandman's horse, that could not be taken without much labour, and when caught, was not worth the trouble it had given. A dictionary of this galimathias was published by Ribou, in 1661, from which or some similar authority, Bret, the editor of Molière, quotes the following tropes of rhetoric, which cannot easily be rendered into English. A night-cap was called (the reader must divine wherefore) *le complice innocent de mensonge*—a chaplet *une chaine spirituelle*—water, *l'humeur celeste*—thieves, *les braves incommodes*, and a disdainful smile, *un bouillon d'orgueil*.

It might render this high strain of fashionable affectation more tolerable in one point of view, that the Cupid of the Hôtel de Rambouillet affected strict Platonism, nor was there indeed much danger to be anticipated to the honour of families from the frigid affectation of his conceited jargon. The *fashion* had only the effect of making the young female aspirant treat with contempt the good man whom she chanced to call husband, for his total ignorance of the regular procedure in love matters. Such, at least, were the ostensible bounds within

which these apish and fantastic tricks were practised; whether the limits were ever transgressed, is a question rather for the scandalous chronicle than the critic. To add singularity of manners to abstruseness of language and sentiment, the lady who entertained these coteries received the company in bed, and the company arranged themselves around her in the alcove where it was placed. Then flowed that inimitable tide of affected conversation, in which one ambiguous, tortuous and metaphysical conceit gave place to another still more obscure,—where, by dint of what the circle termed delicacy of sentiment and felicity of expression, they became perfectly unintelligible, and language, instead of being put to its natural and legitimate purpose of asking and receiving information, was employed to give vent to all the nonsensical extravagances of a bizarre fancy, which resembled legitimate wit as little as a Will-of-the Wisp is like the evening star. True wit, doubtless (but for the time distorted and abused) had some place in the coterie, since Sevigné, Menage, Deshouillères, L'Enclos, and other persons distinguished for talent, encouraged this absurd fashion; forgetting or neglecting the precept of a bard who himself seldom remembered it:—that it is better wit should not be displayed at all, than that every expression should be tortured into a witticism.

There could not be more legitimate food for satire than a system of solemn pedantic foppery, which its proselytes, in the extremity of self-conceit, considered as the most refined perfection of gallantry. While this ridiculous affectation was adopted by

the learned and noble, and even by prelates as well as nobles, Molière, so lately the manager of a company of strolling players, was loading that piece, the discharge of which was to disperse this flock of jackdaws in borrowed feathers.

The title of his drama was taken from one of the rules of the society at the Hôtel de Rambouillet not yet alluded to. As the females were frozen towards their insipid gallants, they made amends by lavishing the extremity of tender friendship upon each other. *Ma chère, ma précieuse*, were their usual terms of endearment, and from thence the title of *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. In this celebrated piece, Molière introduced two females (daughter and niece of a worthy burgess called Gorgibus), who, having become infected with the false wit and gallantry of the *ruelles*, and having substituted, according to a fashion practised by the *élégantes* of the day, the sonorous names of *Aminte* and *Polixène* for their baptismal ones of Cathos and Madelon, with all the sentimental jargon which belonged to their new appellatives, have set themselves up as *précieuses* of the first class. They have, of course, a suitable contempt for honest Gorgibus, whose distress, perplexity, and resentment are extreme, and all occasioned by the perverse elegance of his womankind, who, in their attempts to emulate the follies and conceits of the incomparable Arthenice (a romantic epithet by which Madame de Rambouillet was distinguished, even in her funeral sermon), talk in a style which he cannot comprehend, and act in a manner that leads him to doubt their sanity of mind. The pro-

posals of two gentlemen, approved by Gorgibus, who thought them fit matches for his damsels, have been rejected with such extremity of scorn by the two princesses, that the rejected suitors determine to revenge themselves, which they do by causing their two valets, impudent, conceited coxcombs of course, to be introduced to Aminte and Polixène, as men of fashion and quality. The *Précieuses* mistake the extravagant and absurd foppery, the second-hand airs of finery, and the vulgar impudence of the Marquis de Mascarille and the Vicomte de Jodelet, for the extremity of wit and gallantry: while the discovery, and the shame and confusion with which the unfortunate sentimentalists are overwhelmed, form the diverting conclusion of this amusing drama.

The piece was acted for the first time 18th November, 1659, and received with unanimous applause. The public, like children admitted behind the scenes, saw, with wonder and mirth, the trumpery which they had admired as crowns, sceptres, and royal robes, when beheld at a distance,—thus learning to estimate, at their real value, the affected airs of super-excellence and transcendental elegance assumed by the frequenters of the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

On the other hand, the party who were consequently made the laughing-stock of the theatre, were much hurt and offended, nor was the injury at all the lighter, that some of them had sense enough to feel that the chastisement was deserved. They had no remedy, however, but to swallow their chagrin, and call themselves by their own

names in future. Menage expressed his own recantation in the words of Clovis, when he became a convert to Christianity, and told his assembled Franks they must now burn the idols which they had hitherto adored. The affectation of the period, such as we have described it, received a blow no less effectual than that which Ben Jonson, by his satire called "Cynthia's Revels" inflicted on the kindred folly of Euphuism; or as the author of "The Baviad and Mæviad" dealt to similar affectations of our own day. But Molière made a body of formidable enemies amongst the powerful and the learned, whose false pretensions to wit and elegance he had so rudely exposed.

Two things were remarkable as attending the representation of this excellent satire; first, that an old man, starting up in the parterre, exclaimed, "Courage, Molière, this is real comedy!" and, secondly, that the author himself, perceiving, from the general applause, that he had touched the true vein of composition, declared his purpose henceforward to read his lessons from the human bosom, instead of studying the pages of Terence and Plautus.

Les Précieuses Ridicules has been imitated by Shadwell with considerable success in his comedy of Bury-fair. And here we may remark, that M. Taschereau is led, probably from the example of most English authors, to speak of this dramatist with more contempt than he deserved. Shadwell was unfortunate in being placed in rivalry with Dryden, and still more so in becoming the object of his satire. But he had a strong sense of humour,

and occasionally great power in expressing it. He was the Ben Jonson of his day, however inferior to him in genius; and as a painter of manners, his works ought not to be lost sight of by the English antiquary.

Molière next produced, in 1660, *Sganarelle*, ou *Le Cocu Imaginaire*. His biographer, like Master Ford, in the Merry Wives of Windsor, censures this second title as coarse and indelicate, unpleasing to the ear as the names of Amaimon, Lucifer, and Barbason. We trust that detestation of the vice has since Molière's time introduced among his countrymen such laudable horror against the appellative of the principal sufferer. Since the days of the Italian novellieri, Boccacio, Bandello, and the rest, their tales of intrigue had been imitated in the Cent Nouvelles, the Tales of the Queen of Navarre, and other works of a similar kind. In all of these collections, the seductive intrigues, which carry dishonour and desolation into the bosom of families, had been exposed by the novelists, and listened to by their hearers, the courtiers of a licentious age, as fitting subjects for jest and raillery rather than crimes imperatively demanding censure. If Molière, on the present and future occasions, lent his admirable talents to the same depraved purpose of entertaining profligates by placing their guilt in a ludicrous point of view, Fortune reserved for him a severe retaliation, of which we shall speak hereafter.

After an unsuccessful effort at a serious piece (*Don Garcie de Navarre*, ou *Le Prince Jaloux*), Molière resumed his natural bent; and in *L'Ecole*

des Maris, presented one of his best compositions, and at once obliterated all recollection of his failure.

It was acted at Paris with unanimous applause, and again represented at the magnificent entertainment given by the superintendent of finances, Fouquet, to Louis XIV. and his splendid court. Fouquet, at once the most opulent and the most splendid man of his time, had exhausted every species of incense which could be offered to a royal idol. The beautiful Bejart, whom Molière afterwards married, appeared as a Naiad, in a shell shaped like the chariot of a sea-goddess, and delivered an elegant compliment composed by Pelisson. Le Brun painted the decorations of the scene,—Le Nôtre laid out the surrounding architectural ornaments,—La Fontaine wrote verses,—Molière composed and performed parts which none but himself could have invented. All visible to the eye was mirth unbounded, wealth immeasurable, a mighty king receiving the homage of a devoted subject. But never was there so complete a resemblance of the banquet of Damocles. The sharp glaive, suspended by a single hair, was hanging above the head of the devoted entertainer. Accustomed, like the successful lover of Danaë, to make love in a shower of gold, the financier had found an unexpected resistance in Mademoiselle La Vallière, a beautiful young person, attached to the train of Madame, the King's sister-in-law. Provoked at his want of success, the superintendent watched so closely every motion of the lady, that he discovered he had the King for his rival. Fouquet, at this moment, was not without hopes of attaining the

unbounded power possessed by the lately deceased prime minister, the Cardinal Mazarin. Yet though he nourished this distinguished ambition, his views as a courtier and statesman could not make him suppress his resentment, and, with extreme imprudence, he let La Vallière know that he was acquainted with the secret of her attachment. Indignant at the freedom of the communication, La Vallière lost no time in informing her royal lover of the discovery. It was at the period of the magnificent fête at Vaux, that the King's resentment and jealousy were roused to the highest pitch, by his seeing a portrait of Mademoiselle La Vallière in the cabinet of the ambitious financier. He would have had him arrested and sent to prison on the spot, had not the queen-mother deterred him by the simple yet expressive words—"What! in the middle of an entertainment which he gives to you?" The punishment was only delayed till it could be less scandalous. The disgrace of the superintendent followed close on his magnificent entertainment.

Besides *L'Ecole des Maris*, Molière contributed to the celebrated entertainment at Vaux a dramatic representation, called *Les Fâcheux*, consisting of a series of detached scenes, which were only designed to be acted during the intervals of a ballet, to fill the stage while the dancers were changing their dresses and characters for a new exhibition. In these scenes, a lover, who has an assignation with his mistress, is represented as successively interrupted by various importunate persons (in modern tongue *bores*), who come to intrude on him their company and their follies. But out of such slender

materials, what a lecture upon follies of character and manners has Molière contrived to read us!

Even the jealous fury which animated Louis did not prevent his entering into the humour of "Les Fâcheux," and pointing out to Molière another folly, which might augment the list of the tormenting intruders. This existed in the person of Monsieur de Soyecourt, Grand Veneur, or Great Huntsman to the King, wildly and exclusively attached to the pleasures of the chase. The royal hint was not neglected, but it became necessary, in order to acquire the terms of the chase to be placed in the mouth of the new character, that Molière should apply to Monsieur de Soyecourt himself, who with unsuspicious good-nature, furnished the comedian with an ample vocabulary of the phrases destined to render himself ridiculous. The scene which Molière composed on this occasion exhibits a strong contrast betwixt French and English manners. Dorante is a courtier devoted to the chase, who insists upon telling Eraste a long story about a late hunting-match in which he was engaged; and which was broken off by a country gentleman, who, against all the rules of *venerie*, shot the stag dead with a pistol. In England, such a country gentleman as Squire Western would have understood hunting better than all the nobles of the court of St James's.

M. Taschereau observes, that in one scene of this little unconnected string of scenes, which nevertheless has more wit and nature in it than most regular comedies, the poet has shown his philosophy as well as his power of comedy. It is

where he recognises the efforts of the King to put a stop to the Gothic and barbarous custom of duelling. "It is an example which ought to teach poets how to employ the influence they possess over the human heart." We subscribe to the opinion, yet must add that it was also a high and exquisite touch of flattery, although very properly introduced in the only drama which Molière inscribed to Louis XIV.

L'Ecole des Femmes was Molière's next work of importance. It is a comedy of the highest order. An old gentleman, who had been an intriguer in his youth, and knew (as he flattered himself) all the wiles of womankind, endeavours to avoid what he considers as the usual fate of husbands, by marrying his ward, a beautiful girl, simple almost to silliness, but to whom nature has given as much of old mother Eve's talent for persuasion and imposition as enables her to baffle all the schemes of her aged admirer, and unite herself to a young gallant more suited to her age. The "Country Wife" of Wycherley is an imitation of this piece, with the demerit on the part of the English author of having rendered licentious a plot which in Molière's hands is only gay.

Although this piece was well received and highly applauded, it was at the same time severely criticised by those who had swallowed without digesting the ridicule which the author had heaped on the Hôtel de Rambouillet in the *Précieuses Ridicules*, and on the various conceits and follies of the court in *Les Fâcheux*. Such critics having shown themselves too wise to express the pain

which they felt on their own account, now set up as guardians of the purity of the national morals, and of the national language. A *naïve* expression used by Agnes was represented as depraving the one; a low and somewhat vulgar phrase was insisted upon as calculated to ruin the other. This affected severity in morals and grammar did not impose on the public, who were quite aware of the motive of critics who endeavoured to ground such formidable charges on foundations so limited. The celebrated Boileau drew his pen in defence of his friend, in whose most burlesque expression there truly lurked a learned and useful moral. "Let the envious exclaim against thee," he said, "because thy scenes are agreeable to all the vulgar; if thou wert less acquainted with the art of pleasing, thou wouldst be enabled to please even thy censors." Molière himself wrote a defence of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, "in which," says M. Tascherau, "he had the good fortune to escape the most dangerous fault of an author writing upon his own compositions, and to exhibit wit, where some people would only have shown vanity and self-conceit."

The wrath of these paltry and prejudiced critics proceeded beyond all the bounds of literary censure. The Duc de la Feuillade, supposed to be the original of a ridiculous man of quality introduced by Molière in his *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, was guilty of an action equally unbecoming and brutal, considering that the aristocratic laws of the French society of the day left him at liberty to put a personal affront on the manager of a theatre, whatever his genius or respectability, without being exposed

to render him a personal account. He met Molière in one of the galleries of the Tuileries, and assuming the appearance of one who wished to embrace and salute him—then no uncommon compliment—he seized rudely upon the poet's head with both his hands, and rubbing his face violently against the buttons of his own dress, repeated again and again the words, *tarte à la crême—tarte à la crême—* being one of the phrases in *L'Ecole des Femmes*, on which the critics had fastened as unpolite and barbarous. Greatly to the honour of Louis XIV., he censured with severity the courtier who, under the pretence of zeal for the elegance and purity of the French language, had taken the unmanly opportunity to insult a man of genius within the precincts of his master's palace.

L'In-promptu de Versailles was another fugitive piece, in which Molière, under the eyes of the sovereign, repelled the invidious criticism with which he had been assailed. Boursault, a man of talent and genius, had joined the cry against Molière, under the belief that he had himself been aimed at in the character of Lysidas, the poet, in the interlude. But Boursault prudently retired from the combat.

La Princesse d'Elide, executed upon a signal of the royal sceptre, was composed in haste to garnish a splendid fête of Louis, at Versailles, on the 9th of October, 1664, under the title of "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Island." As the scene belongs to the gorgeous and romantic drama, it afforded little scope to Molière's comic powers, though he has thrown in what the old English stage would have called the humours of Moron, a court jester.

There may have been, however, allusions which are now lost, but which had poignancy at the time, since the entertainment was received with great applause. This production is, like the interlude of *Les Fâcheux*, rather a series of detached scenes, connected by one single interest, which they neither advance nor retard, than a comedy bearing a regular plot.

His next production, of the same year, was a one act comedy, entitled *Le Mariage Forcé*. Sganarelle, a humourist of fifty-three or four, having a mind to marry a fashionable young woman, but feeling some instinctive doubts and scruples, consults several of his friends upon this momentous question; and the inimitable wit of Molière sustains so bald and simple a plot, without permitting the reader to feel a sensation that the piece is wire-drawn, or devoid of interest. The ridicule falls in a great measure on the sophists of the Sorbonne, whose attachment to the categories of Aristotle rendered them so obstinately opposed to every species of philosophical enquiry which transcended the limited sphere of the Stagyrite. The Aristotelian philosophers of the Sorbonne are treated with as little mercy as those of the ancient schools by the satirist Lucian, to whose works Molière seems to have been no stranger. Receiving no satisfactory counsel, and not much pleased with the proceedings of his bride elect, Sganarelle at last determines to give up his engagement, but is cudgelled into compliance by the brother of his intended; and so ends an entertainment which in the hands of any other

would have been meagre enough, but as treated by Molière is full of humour and gaiety.

The concluding incident was taken from an adventure of the celebrated Comte de Grammont, renowned for his wit and gallantry, which made much noise at the time. While residing at the court of Charles II., Grammont had paid his assiduous addresses to the beautiful Miss Hamilton, sister of his future historian, Count Anthony Hamilton; but as fickle as brilliant, the Comte de Grammont, being permitted by Louis XIV. to return to Paris, set off for Dover without taking leave of his mistress. Two brethren of the deserted Ariadne pursued and overtook the fugitive Theseus. "Have you not forgotten something in London, comte?" was the question of the Hamiltons. "In faith, I have," replied the count (more prudent than Sganarelle, and not waiting till things came to extremities), "to marry your sister." And he returned and redeemed his pledge accordingly, with a better grace, at least, than most other persons would have manifested in similar circumstances.

In the evening of the same day which saw *Le Mariage Forcé*, came out, as a part of the royal fête, the three first acts, or rough sketch, of the celebrated satire, entitled *Tartuffe*, one of the most powerful of Molière's compositions. It was applauded; but from the clamour excited against the poet and the performance as an attack on religion, instead of its impious and insidious adversary hypocrisy, the representation was for the time interdicted; a fortunate circumstance, perhaps—since, in consequence, the drama underwent a sedulous

revision, given by Molière to few of his performances.

Le Festin de Pierre—the Feast of the Statue—well known to the modern stage under the name of Don Juan—was the next vehicle of Molière's satire. The story, borrowed from the Spanish, is well known. In giving the sentiments of the libertine Spaniard, the author of *Tartuffe* could not suppress his resentment against the party, by whose interest with the king that piece had been excluded from the stage, or at least its representation suspended. "The profession of a hypocrite," says Don Juan, "has marvellous advantages. The imposture is always respected; and although it may be detected, must never be condemned. Other human vices are exposed to censure, and may be attacked boldly. Hypocrisy alone enjoys a privilege, which stops the mouth of the satirist, and enjoys the repose of sovereign impunity." This expression, with some other passages in the piece (the general tenor of which is certainly not very edifying), called down violent clamours upon the imprudent author. Some critics went so far, as to invoke the spiritual censure, and the doom of the civil magistrate, on Molière, as the Atheist of his own *Festin de Pierre*. He was, however, on this as on other occasions, supported by the decided favour of the King, who then allowed Molière's company to take the title of *Comediens du Roi*, and bestowed on them a pension of seven thousand livres, thereby showing how little he was influenced by the clamours of the poet's enemies, though attacking his mind on a weak point.

In the month of September, 1665, the King having commanded such an entertainment to be prepared, the sketch or impromptu called *L'Amour Médecin*, was, in the course of five days, composed, got up, as the players call it, and represented. In this sketch, slight as it was, Molière contrived to declare war against a new and influential body of enemies. This was the medical faculty, which he had slightly attacked in the *Festin de Pierre*. Every science has its weak points, and is rather benefited than injured by the satire which, putting pedantry and quackery out of fashion, opens the way to an enlightened pursuit of knowledge. The medical faculty at Paris, in the middle of the seventeenth century, was at a very low ebb. Almost every physician was attached to some particular form of treatment, which he exercised on his patients without distinction, and which probably killed in as many instances as it effected a cure. Their exterior, designed, doubtless, to inspire respect by its peculiar garb and formal manner, was in itself matter of ridicule. They ambled on mules through the city of Paris, attired in an antique and grotesque dress, the jest of its laughter-loving people, and the dread of those who were unfortunate enough to be their patients. The consultations of these sages were conducted in a barbarous Latinity, or if they condescended to use the popular language, they disfigured it with an unnecessary profusion of technical terms, or rendered it unintelligible by a prodigal tissue of scholastic formalities of expression. M. Taschereau quotes the verses of a contemporary:

" Affecter un air pedantesque,
Cracher du Grec et du Latin,
Longue perruque, habit grotesque,
De la fourrure et du satin :
Tout cela reuni fait presque
Ce qu'on appelle un médecin."

The rules taught to the faculty were calculated to cherish every ancient error and exclude every modern improvement, for they were sworn never to seek out discoveries in the science which they practised, or to depart from the aphorisms of Hippocrates. Daring empirics were found amongst them, who adventured upon the administration of chemical receipts, of which they could not even conjecture the effect, and there were individuals believed capable, if gained by a sufficient bribe, of accelerating the death of the patients whom they came to cure. The medical science was, in short, enveloped in ignorance, and to encourage those who followed the profession in the attainment of real knowledge, it was necessary to expose the pedantry and insufficiency of these formal and empty pretenders to a science of which they knew nothing. To rescue the noble power of healing, which has in our days been followed by so many men of minds as vigorous and powerful as their hearts were benevolent, from the hands of ignorance and empiricism, was a task worthy the satire of Molière, who, with Le Sage for his colleague, went far in accomplishing it.

The venerable dulness and pedantic ignorance of the faculty was incensed at the ridicule cast upon it in *L'Amour Médecin*, especially, as four of its most distinguished members were introduced under

Greek names, invented by Boileau for his friend's use. The consultation held by these sages, which respects every thing save the case of the patient—the ceremonious difficulty with which they are at first brought to deliver their opinions—the vivacity and fury with which each finally defends his own, menacing the instant death of the patient, if any other treatment be observed, seemed all to the public highly comical, and led many reflecting men to think Lisette was not far wrong, in contending that a patient should not be said to die of a fever or a consumption, but of four doctors and two apothecaries. The farce enlarged the sphere of Molière's enemies, but as the poet suffered none of the faculty to prescribe for him, their resentment was of the less consequence.

The *Misanthrope*, accounted by the French critics the most correct of Molière's compositions, was the next vehicle of his satire against the follies of the age. Except for the usual fault of his gratuitously adopted coarseness, it is admirably imitated in the "Plain Dealer," of Wycherley. Alceste is an upright and manly character, but rude, and impatient even of the ordinary civilities of life and the harmless hypocrisies of complaisance, by which the ugliness of human nature is in some degree disguised. He quarrels with his friend Philinte for receiving the bow of a man he despises; and with his mistress for enjoying a little harmless ridicule of her friend, when her back is turned. He tells a conceited poet, that he prefers the sense and simplicity of an old ballad to the false wit of a modern sonnet—he proves his judgment to be just,—and

receives a challenge from the poet in reward of his criticism. Such a character, placed in opposition to the false and fantastic affectations of the day, afforded a wide scope for the satire of Molière. The situation somewhat resembles that of Eraste in *Les Fâcheux*. But the latter personage is only interrupted by fools and impostors during a walk in the Tuileries, where he expects to meet his mistress. The distress of Alceste lies deeper. He is thwarted by pretenders and coxcombs in the paths of life itself, and his peculiar temper renders him impatient of being pressed and shouldered by them; so that, like an irritable man in a crowd, he resents those inconveniencies, to which men of equanimity submit, not as a matter of choice, indeed, but as a point of necessity. The greater correctness of this piece may be owing to the lapse of nine months (an unusual term of repose for the muse of Molière) betwixt the appearance of *L'Amour Médecin*, and that of the *Misanthrope*. Yet this chef-d'œuvre was at first coldly received by the Parisian audience; and, to render it more attractive, Molière was compelled to attach to its representation the lively farce of *Le Médecin malgré lui*. In a short time the merit of the *Misanthrope* became acknowledged by the public, and even many of those critics who had hitherto been hostile united in its praise.

Yet scandal was not silent; for Molière was loudly censured, as having, in the person of Alceste, ridiculed the Duke de Montausier, a man of honour and virtue, but of blunt uncourteous manners. The duke informed that he had been brought

on the stage by Molière, threatened vengeance; but being persuaded to see the play, he sought out the author instantly, embraced him repeatedly, and assured him, that if he had really thought of him when composing the *Misanthrope*, he regarded it as an honour which he could never forget.

The lively farce of *Le Médecin malgré lui*, was translated by Fielding, under the title of the "Mock Doctor." The story is taken from an old fabliau, which in its turn has probably been derived from an Eastern tale. In the original tale, the Mock Doctor having been cudgelled into a leech of deep skill, is commanded by the king of the country, on pain of perishing under the bastinado, to cure at once all the sick of the capital, whom the well-meaning sovereign has assembled for the purpose, in an immense hospital. The "Médecin malgré lui" extricates himself with dexterity. He assembles his patients in a great hall, in one end of which is lighted a mighty fire.

"My friends," says the physician, "I can, it is true, cure all your complaints, but the principal ingredient in my panacea, is the ashes of a man who has been burned alive! As this is indispensable to the composition of the medicine, I have no doubt that the patient amongst you who feels himself most deplorably indisposed, will willingly agree to be sacrificed as the victim, by means of whose death the rest are to be cured. You, sir," addressing a gouty patient, "have much the appearance of being the greatest invalid present."—"Who, I, sir?" replied Gout, "appearances are deceitful, I was never better in my life than at this moment."—"If well in health what business have you among the sick? Get out with you! You," to a paralytic patient, "have, I presume, no objection to become the scape-goat."—"Every objection p-p-possible," stuttered Palsy, and was turned out to hobble after Gout. The doctor gets rid of all his patients in the same manner, without any loss of reputation; for as they leave the hospital they are interrogated severally by the king, to

whom, under apprehension of being sent back to be calcined, they all report themselves perfectly cured."

We cannot help thinking, that if Molière had been acquainted with this singular conclusion of the story, he would have, under some form or other, introduced it into his whimsical and entertaining little drama. The author himself treated the piece as a trifle, for which he is affectionately reproved by the author of the following verses:—

"Molière, dit-on, ne l'appelle
Qu'une petite bagatelle :
Mais cette bagatelle est d'un esprit si fin,
Que, s'il faut que je vous le die,
L'estime qu'on en fait est une maladie,
Qui fait que, dans Paris, tout court au *Médecin*."

But not even the praises paid to the *Misanthrope*, though a piece of a mood much higher than *Le Médecin malgré lui*, satisfied Molière. "*Vous verrez bien autre chose*," said he to Boileau, when the latter congratulated him on the success of the chef-d'œuvre which we have just named. He anticipated the success of the most remarkable of his performances, the celebrated *Tartuffe*, in which he has unmasked and branded vice, as in his lighter pieces he has chastised folly. This piece had been acted before Louis, before his queen, and his mother, and at the palace of the great Prince of Condé; but the scruples infused into the King long induced him to hesitate ere he removed the interdict which prohibited its representation. Neither were these scruples yet removed. Permission was, indeed, given to represent the piece, but under the title of the "Impostor," and calling the principal person, Panulphe, for it seems the name of Tar-

tuffe was peculiarly offensive. The King, having left Paris for the army, the president of the parliament of Paris prohibited any further representation of the obnoxious piece, thus disguised, although licensed by his majesty. Louis did not resent this interference, and two compositions of Molière were interposed betwixt the date of the suspension which we have noticed, and the final permission to bring *Tartuffe* on the stage. These were—*Mélicerte*, a species of heroic pastoral, in which Molière certainly did not excel,—and *Le Sicilien, ou L'Amour Peintre*, a few lively scenes linked together, so as to form a pleasing introduction to several of those dances in costume, or ballets, as they were called, in which Louis himself often assumed a character.

At length, in August, 1667, *Le Tartuffe*, so long suppressed, appeared on the stage, and in the depth and power of its composition left all authors of comedy far behind. The art with which the "Impostor" is made to develope his real character, without any of the usual soliloquies or addresses to a confidant, for the benefit of the audience, has been always admired as inimitable. The heart of a man who had least desired, and could worst bear close investigation, is discovered and ascertained in all its bearings, gradually, yet certainly, as navigators trace the lines and bearings of an unknown coast. The persons amongst whom this illustrious hypocrite performs the principal character, are traced with equal distinctness. The silly old mother, obstinate from age as well as bigotry; the modest and sensible Cléante; his brother-in-law, Orgon, prepared to be a dupe by prepossession

and self-opinion; Damis, impetuous and unreflecting; Mariane, gentle and patient, with the hasty and petulant sallies of Dorine, who ridicules the family she serves with affection; are all faithfully drawn, and contribute their own share on the effect of the piece, while they assist in bringing on the catastrophe. In this catastrophe, however, there is something rather inartificial. It is brought about too much by a *tour de force*, too entirely by the "de par le roi," to deserve the praise bestowed on the rest of the piece. It resembles, in short, too nearly the receipt for making the "Beggars' Opera" end happily, by sending some one to call out a reprieve. But as it manifested at the same time the power of the prince, and afforded opportunity for panegyric on his acuteness in detecting and punishing fraud, Molière, it is certain, might have his own good reasons for unwinding and disentangling the plot by means of an *exempt* or king's messenger.

Besides the honourable tribute paid to the sovereign in the close of the *Tartuffe*, a diverting part of the colloquy in the first act was borrowed from an expression of Louis himself. It chanced that upon the eve of a fast, the king being hungry, sat down to a repast, and invited Perefixe, Bishop of Rhodez, to bear him company. The prelate declined with affectation, and with an obstinacy of which the king desired to know the motive. After the bishop had left the apartment, some one gave Louis a particular account of his reverence's dinner; which consisted of so many dishes, and was so well done justice to, that his majesty could have

no apprehension of his suffering from famine. At the name of each new dish, the king exclaimed, in a varied inflection of voice, "*Oh, le pauvre homme!*" the very expression which Orgon uses to express his sympathy with Tartuffe. This anecdote associated the prince, in a certain degree, with the success of the play, and may have inclined him at last to the favourable estimate which he formed of *Tartuffe.*

But our readers may request, after all, to know our sentiments on the objection of profanity, which, though unquestionably it was advanced against Molière by men actuated by personal and invidious motives, was also supported by the authority of Bossuet and Bourdaloue.

"As true and false doctrine," says the latter preacher, "have I know not how many actions in common betwixt them, and the exterior of the one can hardly be discriminated from the other, it is not only an easy, but almost a necessary consequence, that the raillery which attacks one should affect the other, and that the features imputed to the one should disfigure the other. Such has been the actual consequence when profane wits have undertaken to censure hypocrisy, and thereby caused unjust suspicions to be entertained of real piety, by malignant interpretations put upon that which is false. This is what they have attempted in exposing to the laughter of a public theatre, an imaginary hypocrite, and turning, in his person, the most holy things into ridicule, representing him as blaming the scandals of the world in an extravagant manner, and as affecting a scrupulous conscience on indifferent matters, while he scrupled not, secretly, to meditate the most atrocious crimes, assuming a rueful penitentiary visage, which only served to cover the most sensual indulgences, and affixing to him, as their caprice suggests, an exterior of austere piety, as a cover for the basest and most mercenary purposes."

Such is the charge brought by a wise, eloquent, and pious man, in his sermon on the seventh Sun-

day after Easter. But wisdom, eloquence, and piety, are all liable to error, and differing essentially from Bourdaloue in the opinion which he has expressed, we have deemed it only justice to state the case in his own forcible words before we venture to express our humble sentiments.

We may remark, in the first place, that were the preacher's arguments to be carried to extremity, it would follow as a result, that no vice could be blamed, lest a censure should arise on its corresponding virtue. In that mode of reasoning, a satire upon avarice would be objectionable as a censure of economy, and the blame applicable to profusion would be proscribed as discrediting generosity. For every virtue, brilliant in itself, is followed by a vice, attached to it as shadow is to substance, bearing in its milder aspect the appearance of the virtue carried to excess, and seeming as inseparable from it as Bourdaloue declares hypocrisy to be from true religion. But are we, therefore, to refrain from censuring the vicious excess, because we render due honour to the virtue practised in its just mean? We do not, however, insist on this general argument, because we willingly concede that it is less lawful and even more dangerous to treat lightly the language and observances of religion, than those which only regard moral conduct and social life.

We agree, therefore, with Father Bourdaloue, that the rash application of satire or ridicule, as the single test of truth, from which there lies no appeal, may lead to the worst consequences where religion is in question. To hold up to ridicule the

scruples of a conscience really tender and fearful of offence, even if these scruples are stretched, in our estimation, to the verge of absurdity, is, we think, likely to be attended with all the scandal to true religion which the learned preacher apprehends. But, grant the existence of such criminals as Tartuffe (and, alas! who dare deny that there have existed, and perhaps are yet to be found such snakes in the bosom of Christian society), we search in vain in Scripture, or in the practice of the best friends of religion in all ages, for any warrant to spare them. If we look to the Holy Scripture, our best and safest guide, no crime is denounced more frequently, or described as more odious to the Author of our religion, than that of the hypocrites who made a gain of godliness, and possessed themselves by means of long prayers of the goods of orphans. We find them repeatedly mentioned, and with a deepness of denunciation on their practices which seems to authorize their being held up to detestation by every means which can be taken to expose moral criminals. If the state of society be such, that characters of a cast so dangerous,

> "Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne,
> Are touched and shamed by ridicule alone,"

where shall we find the means of assailing them unless by the influence of satire?

If ridicule as well as reason had not been employed, and that with an unsparing hand, the whole Christian world would at this day have groaned under the oppressions and usurpations of the Church of Rome; or if Louis XIV. had fully

apprehended the satire of Molière, he might have saved that great blot on his name, the persecution of his Protestant subjects, and the breach of public faith, in revoking the Edict of Nantes. Ridicule is, we allow, a hazardous weapon, to be used with caution; yet when employed with a good faith and honest purpose, it is the most formidable and effectual which can be directed against a crime equally odious in the sight of God and dangerous to human society. It is, we think, in the allegorical romance of Spenser, that a champion is introduced bending with awe and reluctance his lance against an opponent covered by the red cross shield. But when that sign is found to disguise an impostor and a felon, the true knight does not permit him for an instant to enjoy its protection. There is much less danger of religion being discredited by the discovery and exposure of devoted and self-seeking hypocrisy, than in permitting that vice to lurk like a concealed and consuming canker in the bosom of society, undetected and uncauterized. To assert that the practice of exterior observances is to preserve the hypocrite from exposure, because it may occasion a scrupulous inquisition into the conduct of the really conscientious, is saying, that we ought to receive a false coinage because it is an imitation of that which is true, or that the profession of religion ought to serve, like the churches in Popish countries, as an asylum for all that is vicious and criminal in society.

If, indeed, hypocrisy is to be sacred from ridicule, it is not easy to see to what tribunal that odious vice is to be delivered for trial and censure.

The scandal which Père Bourdaloue apprehends to real religion, must be incurred by every species of inquisition that shall be made into the reality of religious pretexts; and yet without some such inquisition the tares cannot be severed from the wheat—the forged and worthless imitation distinguished from the precious and inimitable reality. The same evil would arise from punishing the crimes of Tartuffe in a court of justice, as from exposing them upon the stage. But, surely, although such exposure may lead men to try more severely the pretensions of such as make peculiar professions of devotion, the separation of the pure gold from the dross must in the end lead to the first being held in higher estimation, and to the worthlessness of the second being exposed to deserved contempt.

We have hitherto considered the case of an incorrigible hypocrite, as of one who is punished not with a view to his correction, but to his detection and the prevention of the mischief he may work in society. But this is only half of the real question. Spiritual pride, a sin, and a great one, often creeps insensibly into bosoms which are most formed to nourish devotional sentiments. The self-supposed elect of the Deity is too apt (so easily are our best inclinations turned to corruption and perversion) to look down on the race of worldly men, and, in his delusion, to return thanks, with the Pharisee, that he is not like the contrite Publican. A portrait like that of Tartuffe may arrest such a man in his course, by showing him that the fairest professions and the strictest observances may be

consistent with the foulest purposes; and that though we may strictly discharge our religious duties, we are not to arrogate to ourselves merits towards heaven, or entertain hopes which can only be grounded on merits far different from our own. Such a picture may also call to reflection the bold and ambitious impostor, who, from the desire of acquiring influence over his fellow-men, is tempted to use his religious character as the means of effecting his purpose. As the career of such a character often begins and proceeds to a certain length in the sincere feeling of devotion, it may be prevented from ending in a course of hypocrisy equally dangerous to the individual himself and to society, by the public exposure of the contents of one of those sepulchres, whitened on the outside, which are a charnel-house within.

We do not desire to travel out of the record, or to lay down any general rule in what cases satire ought, or ought not, to be employed in reprehension of hypocrisy. Undoubtedly there may be instances to which Bourdaloue's arguments are applicable, and where it may be better that a criminal person should be punished, or expelled from society, without public exposure. But the case of Tartuffe is that of a vilely wicked man, rendering the profession of religion hateful, by abusing it for the worst purposes; and if such characters occurred, as there is little reason to doubt, in the time and court of Louis XIV., we can see no reason against their being gibbeted in effigy. The poet himself is at pains to show that he draws the true line of distinction betwixt the hypocrite and

the truly religious man. When the duped Orgon, astonished at the discovery of Tartuffe's villany, expresses himself doubtful of the existence of real worth, Cléante replies to him with his usual sense and moderation.

> " Quoi ! parce qu'un fripon vous dupe avec audace
> Sous le pompeux éclat d'un austère grimace,
> Vous voulez que partout on soit fait comme lui,
> Et qu'aucun vrai dévot ne se trouve aujourd'hui ?
> Laissez aux libertins ces sottes consequences :
> Démêlez la vertu d'avec ses apparences,
> Ne hasardez jamais vôtre estime trop tôt,
> Et soyez pour cela dans le milieu qu'il faut.
> Gardez vous, s'il se peut, d'honorer l'imposture :
> Mais au vrai zèle aussi n'allez pas faire injure ;
> Et s'il vous faut tomber dans une extrémité,
> Pêchez plutôt encor de cet autre côté."—*Act V. Scene I.*

After the victorious reception of *Tartuffe*, and before the clamour and controversy to which it gave occasion were nearly ended, Molière presented the stage with the wild and lively comedy of *Amphitryon*. We must own that a piece founded on such a subject does not appear to us to have been wisely calculated to efface the reproaches cast upon the author of *Tartuffe* as a corrupter of national morals, and that a satire on some decided vice, fashionable at the time, would have much better supported his defence against the devotees, whether true or false, than a drama, which, though drawing its origin from Pagan times, must always remain censurable. But the subject had been admitted on every stage in Europe, although, according to Riccoboni, it should not be received on any theatre, where morals are respected.

The truth may, perhaps, be, that Molière, weary for the moment of contention, was willing to compose a play, entertaining from its subject, and affording room for jests, which neither men of fashion, doctors, princesses, nor bigots, could regard as personal. He might remember what the great Condé said to Louis XIV., when the King asked him how the auditors, so sensitive about *Tartuffe*, listened, without indignation, to the profanities and indecencies of a coarse farce called *Scaramouche Hermite*. "Because," replied Condé, "it only violates decency and religion, without attacking priests and bigots." Be that as it may, Amphitryon was handed with infinite humour, and with as much decency as the story permitted, and censure was drowned in laughter.

Molière was not so fortunate in his next piece, though equally well received, and no less deserving of it. *George Dandin*, a wealthy citizen, who has had the imprudence to marry a sprig of quality, daughter of an old jackass of nobility called Monsieur De Sotenville, and his no less noble spouse Madame de la Prudoterie, is exposed at once to the coquetry of a light-headed wife, who despises his birth and understanding, and to the rigorous sway of her parents; who, called upon to interfere with their authority, place their daughter on the right, and the unhappy roturier, their son-in-law, in the wrong, on every appeal which is made to them. Angelica is represented as thoughtless, not criminal, and appearances, at least, are thus saved. Nevertheless, there was more than one Sotenville about court, and Dandin in the city, who felt the

ridicule sting home, and complained, as Rousseau did afterwards, that in seeking food for his satiric vein, Molière was not unwilling to pervert the order of society, and to sow dissension in the bosom of families. The public again laughed at the sufferers, and exculpated the poet, or became, by their applause, his accomplices in the pretended crime.

George Dandin was acted 18th July, 1668. On the 3d September, in the same year, the moral comedy of *L'Avare* was presented to the public by the fertile muse of our author. The general conception of the piece, as well as many of the individual scenes, are taken from Plautus, but adapted to French society, with a degree of felicity belonging to Molière alone. The poor (and most people think themselves so with relation to their expenses, are usually somewhat envious of the rich, and very willing to enjoy a laugh at their cost; especially if the latter stand convicted of avarice, or saving money, not for the sake of what it can procure, but for the purpose of amassing and hoarding it. No vice meets with less sympathy than avarice, for the good reason that all think that they could employ, to advantage, what the miser seems to possess only after the manner of Æsop's dog in the manger, withholding it from others, yet denying to himself the enjoyments which it might command. The vice also, when it gains possession of an individual, shows so mean, inconsequential, and unreasonable, that we cannot wonder at its being a favourite subject for satirical poetry. The highest compliment paid to the truth of Molière's picture was by an actual miser, who was so much delighted with the

representation, that he did not grudge the money which his admission had cost, because the piece, as he argued, contained such excellent lessons of economy. It is remarkable that M. Taschereau, while he mentions this play as an immortal page in the history of French manners, seems to think that it records a character which has now ceased to exist in Paris. Elwes has been long in his grave; but we believe that Harpagons could yet be found on this side of the Channel. *L'Avare* was less favourably received than usual; the reason assigned is its being written in prose;—but posterity did Molière ample justice:—it was transferred to the British stage, of which it still retains possession, by the celebrated Fielding

Monsieur De Pourceaugnac, acted in autumn, 1669, "is," says Voltaire, "a farce; but in all Molière's farces are found scenes worthy of the highest class of comedy." It is mixed, undoubtedly, with much buffoonery of a coarse and low kind; but this was necessary to attract large popular audiences. "I am the manager of a theatre as well as an author," said Molière. "I must make some money, as well as correct and instruct, and I am necessarily sometimes induced to consult the profit and interest of my company, at the expense of my own fame as an author." To a confession so frank and manly no critic can venture to reply; the only wonder is, how little, comparatively speaking, there is of meanness or sacrifice to public taste, how much of real wit and comedy, in compositions which claim no higher name than farces.

The province of Limoges has been esteemed the

Thebes of France, and its natives, as if born in a grosser air, are popularly supposed peculiarly dull, and liable to imposition. A Limosin gentleman, named Monsieur De Pourceaugnac (almost all the names of that country terminate in *ac*), comes to Paris to marry Julie, the heroine; the authority of her father having destined her hand to him. But Julie has a lover, and this lover has the art to play off so many tricks and mystifications upon the provincial suitor, that he finally relinquishes his suit in despair. The piece being a *comedie-ballet*, the comic scenes are intermingled with pageants resembling the ancient masque, which were ingeniously contrived so as to blend with the interest of the piece. What is delivered as real comic dialogue is so excellent, that Diderot has well said, the critic would be much mistaken who should think there were men more capable of writing *Monsieur De Pourceaugnac* than of composing the *Misanthrope*. This piece was brought on the English stage under the title of the *Brave Irishman*. The object of the tricks and jests of the scene is, in that little piece, an honest Hibernian, whom the author has gifted with a perfect ignorance of the town, and a competent quantity of confusion of ideas, but, at the same time, with so much of the native gallantry of his country, that, instead of encountering the fate of Monsieur De Pourceaugnac, he breaks through all the toils which have been spread for him, and carries off the lady in spite of his intriguing rival.

Omitting *Les Amans Magnifiques*, called by Molière a minor comedy, but which may be rather

considered as a piece of frame-work for the introduction of scenic pageantry, and which is only distinguished by some satirical shafts, directed against the now obsolete folly of judicial astrology, we hasten to notice a masterpiece of Molière's art in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. This piece was written to please the court and gentry, at the expense of the *nouveaux riches*, who, rendered wealthy by the sudden acquisition of immense fortune, become desirous to emulate such as have been educated in the front ranks of society, in those accomplishments, whether mental or personal, which cannot be gracefully acquired after the early part of life is past. A grave, elderly gentleman learning to dance is proverbially ridiculous; but the same absurdity attaches to every one, who, suddenly elevated from his own sphere, becomes desirous of imitating, in the most minute particulars, those who are denizens of that to which he is raised. It is scarcely necessary to notice, that the ridicule directed against such characters as Monsieur Jourdain properly applies, not to their having made their fortunes, if by honest means, but to their being ambitious to distinguish themselves by qualities inconsistent with their age, habits of thinking, and previous manners. Jonson, before the time of Molière, had described, in the character of Sogliardo, a character something like Monsieur Jourdain, to whom the Heralds' College had assigned for crest a headless boar. "And rampant too—troth I commend the Herald's wit," observes one of the personages. "He has decyphered him with a swine without a head, without brain, wit, or any thing, indeed, ramping to gen-

tility." But the comic power of Molière has dwelt upon and illustrated the character, which Jonson only indicated by a few rough outlines; and there are few scenes, even in this admirable author's performances, more laughable than those of Jourdain's scenes with his various teachers, illustrated by the raillery of Nicole, who sees and exposes so naturally the folly of her master.

The subjects of raillery most generally piquant to the high-born and courtly, are those directed against such intruders as Monsieur Jourdain, whom wealth emboldens to thrust upon them an awkward pretension to equality. Yet the court of France did not receive *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in a favourable manner, when first presented at Chambord, on 14th October, 1670. Louis XIV., contrary to his wont, sate silent during the entertainment, and did not, as had been his custom hitherto, address a single word of encouragement to the author. *Regis ad exemplar*—the lords of the court looked cold on Molière, and the tongues of all his enemies were unchained. Some called shame upon him, for having represented Dorante, a man of quality, united in a scheme for duping Monsieur Jourdain, and partaking his spoils. Others, with more judgment, exclaimed against the extravagant interlude, in which the *bourgeois gentilhomme* is persuaded that the Grand Seignor has made him a Mamamouchi, a knight of an imaginary order, and goes through the ceremony of a mock installation. Those very critics who asked how Molière had hoped to pass such gibberish upon them as was sung on this occasion, had listened with tranquillity,

nay, with affected delight, to entertainments of the same kind, in which Louis himself had appeared as a performer. The friends of Molière made no very judicious defence. They endeavoured to represent the plot of the interlude as probable, and quoted the instance of the Abbé St Martin, who had been duped into a belief that he had received honours from the King of Siam. But Molière's apology rested on the very nature of the comedie-ballet, which admits of every species of incident, provided it produces good music and merry dances.

Several days elapsed between the first and second representation, during which Molière sustained all the anxiety of a discountenanced author; but, after the piece had been acted for the second time, Louis at once did justice to the poet and to his own judgment. The piece, he said, was excellent; and he had only suspended his opinion till he should be assured that he was speaking on mature reflection, and not under the seductive impression of excellent acting.

Of course the tone of the courtiers changed; the chorus of "Ha la ba, Ba la chou," became wit and sense, and Dorante was only a man of quality who inflicted condign punishment on an insolent roturier, and abated his fever of conceit by assisting to drain his pocket. A certain duke, in particular, who had been loud in declaring against the dancing Turks and their unintelligible mummery, now exclaimed in well-painted rapture, "Molière is inimitable. He has reached a point of perfection to which none of the ancients ever attained."

Les Fourberies de Scapin, an imitation of the

Phormio of Terence, was Molière's next performance. It was written not for the amusement of the court, but for the diversion of the city of Paris, and possesses no other interest than what can be produced by whimsical interest, the tricks of an ingenious valet,

"From top to toe the Geta now in vogue,"

upon an ill-tempered and avaricious father, in behalf of a giddy and extravagant son. There is no severe strain of morality in such a plot; but it is absurd to suppose, that either parents will become dishonest, or sons disobedient, because they see Scapin and Leandre cheat old Argante. It would be as reasonable to suppose, that a peasant would go home and beat his wife, because Punch, in the puppet-show, cudgels Joan. This comedy is one of adventure and intrigue, with little pretension to delineation of character. But Molière's exquisite skill in dialogue could not be suppressed or concealed. We doubt if, with his utmost efforts, he could have been absolutely dull, without the assistance of a pastoral subject and heroic measure. The phrase, *Que diable alla-t-il faire dans cette galère?* will live as long as the French language.

Psyche may be omitted as a subject totally unfitted for Molière's genius; we are even tempted to say, it could not be the work of the author of the *Misanthrope*, with its brilliant associates in fame. *Non omnia*—the highest genius has its natural bounds. *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, which next appears, turns entirely upon the oddities, absurdities, and affectations of the provincial noblesse, who had, at that time, manners and habits of thinking extreme-

ly ridiculous in the eyes of the more polished society of the court. Molière must have been completely acquainted with these ludicrous points in the character of this class of society, as he had resided in so many different parts of France, at the head of his wandering troop. Accordingly he has presented us with the rural Dowager, who is deeply incensed that a man of quality at court, whose family is not, perhaps, above two hundred years old, should dare to compare his gentility with that of her deceased husband, who had lived all his life in the country, kept a pack of hounds, and signed himself *Count*, in every bill, bond or acquittance. The clownishness of the poor lady's servants is humorously contrasted with her vain attempts to make them keep up the appearances she thinks suitable to her rank. It is, perhaps, the piece of Molière's in which foreigners feel the comic point least forcibly; but it was followed by one, the interest of which is vivid and unimpaired by the course of time.

This is *Les Femmes Savantes*, acted on 11th March, 1672; it was directed against a new female foible which had sprung up in the world of fashion, after the explosion of that of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Always ambitious of exclusive distinction, as they dared no longer render themselves conspicuous by the jargon of romance, they adopted the honours of science, and aspired to the dignity of learned ladies. Molière, "the Contemplator," as his friends called him, did not suffer this new species of pedantry to elude his vigilance. In fact it was of the same *genus*, though of a different species

from that which he had formerly assailed successfully; for modish affectation possesses as many heads as the fabled hydra, of which

"One still bourgeons where another falls;"

and the satirist, on his part, deserved the praise due to a moral Hercules.

Out of a fashion or humour, which to an ordinary man would have but afforded a few scenes, Molière has found sufficient interest to fill up five acts of one of his best regular comedies. The Abbé Cotin—a personage who, affecting to unite in himself the rather inconsistent characters of a writer of poems of gallantry and a powerful and excellent preacher, had obtained in the satires of Boileau a painful immortality—was also distinguished in *Les Femmes Savantes* as one of the leading beaux-esprit of the day, a poet *à la mode*, who, with equal truth and modesty, had the assurance to claim for himself the title of the Father of French Epigram. His dramatic name was originally Tricotin, which, as too plainly pointing out the individual, was softened into Trissotin. The following are the colours with which Molière has painted the unfortunate academician, for such Cotin had the honour to be.

——————————— "Monsieur Trissotin
M'inspire au fond de l'âme un dominant chagrin.
Je ne puis consentir, pour gagner ses suffrages
A me déshonorer en prisant ses ouvrages;
C'est par eux qu'à mes yeux il a d'abord paru,
Et je le connoissois avant que l'avoir vu.
Je vis, dans le fatras des écrits qu'il nous donne,
Ce qu'étale en tous lieux sa pedante personne,
La constante hauteur de sa présomption,
Cette intrépidité de bonne opinion,

Cet indolent état de confiance extrême,
Qui le rend en tout temps si content de soi-même,
Qui fait qu'à son mérite incessamment il rit,
Qu'il se sait si bon gré de tout ce qu'il écrit,
Et qu'il ne voudroit pas changer sa renommée
Contre tous les honneurs d'un général d'armée."

The coxcombry of Trissotin is most pleasantly contrasted with the severe, grave, and more formal folly and presumption of Vadius, a pedant of heavier pretensions, founded upon his scholarship. The effect produced by the introduction of this brace of pretenders to the heroines, upon whom their supposed merits produce the same effect as the fashionable brilliancy of Mascarille and Jodelet in *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, is extremely comical; nor is the behaviour of the two originals to each other less so, since, after dispensing the necessary degree of mutual flattery, a mistake of the pedant in criticising a madrigal of which Trissotin was the author, sets them together by the ears, and produces a scene of quarrelling as ridiculous as that of mutual flattery which preceded it.

The character of the learned ladies, who exclaim in rapture at sight of a man who understands Greek, dismiss their female domestic because she does not understand the delicacies of French grammar, and wellnigh cashier a lacquey, not for dropping a chair, but because he does not know the consequence of any derangement from the centre of gravity, is well contrasted with the foible of the Father of the Family, a man not devoid of good sense, and extremely fond of vindicating his title to be obeyed, so long as his wife is absent, but submitting, on all occasions, when, he is called upon

to maintain his rights by courageous perseverance against the will of his helpmate. This play has been always considered one of Molière's most powerful, as it is one of his most regular comedies.

The last of this great author's labours was at once directed against the faculty of medicine, and aimed at its most vulnerable point—namely, the influence used by some unworthy members of the profession to avail themselves of the nervous fears and unfounded apprehensions of hypochondriac patients. Instead of treating imaginary maladies as a mental disease, requiring moral medicine, there have been found in all times medical men, capable of listening to the rehearsal of these brain-sick whims as if they were real complaints, prescribing for them as such, and receiving the wages of imposition, instead of the honourable reward of science. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the faculty has always possessed members of a spirit to condemn and regret such despicable practices. There cannot be juster objects of satire than such empirics, nor is there a foible more deserving of ridicule than the selfish timidity of the hypochondriac, who, ungrateful for the store of good health with which nature has endowed him, assumes the habitual precautions of an infirm patient.

Molière has added much to the humour of the piece by assigning to the *Malade Imaginaire* a strain of frugality along with his love of medicine, which leads him, to take every mode that may diminish the expense of his supposed indisposition. The expenses of a sick-bed are often talked of, but it is only the imaginary valetudinarian who thinks

of carrying economy into that department; the real patient has other things to think of. Argan, therefore, is discovered taxing his apothecary's bill, at once delighting his ear with the flowery language of the Pharmacopœia, and gratifying his frugal disposition by clipping off some items and reducing others, and arriving at the double conclusion, first, that if his apothecary does not become more reasonable, he cannot afford to be a sick man any longer; and secondly, that as he has swallowed fewer drugs by one-third this month than he had done the last, it was no wonder that he was not so well. The inference "*Je le dirai à Monsieur Purgon, afin qu'il mette ordre à cela,*" is irresistibly comic.

It is scarcely an overstrained circumstance that an original, at once so fond of medicine and so chary of his money, should think of marrying his daughter to a young cub of a medical student, who is to be dubbed doctor in a few days. He is directed to this choice, both by the honour in which he holds the faculty, and the desire to possess the necessary medical advice within his own family, which he is obliged to purchase at so dear a rate. A second wife, the stepmother of the destined bride, soothes her husband in this as well as his other humours. The match is opposed, and finally with success, by the inclinations of Angélique, the daughter, and the intrigues of her lover, Cléante, seconded by Toinette, a *fille de chambre* of the same brisk lively humour which the author loved to draw. Thomas Diafoirus, the young candidate for the privilege of killing or curing, is an admirable portrait of its

particular class. Pedantry is never more ridiculous than when associated with youth, upon which it sits so awkwardly.

There is a stage anecdote about the representation of the characters, worth the remark of more than one manager. An actress of his troop, of considerable pretensions, had married an inferior comedian named Beauveau, who had been at one time a candle-snuffer in the theatre. The parts of Toinette and Thomas Diafoirus were intrusted to this couple. Molière made so many critical objections to the lady's performance that she lost all patience. "You say all this to me," said she, "and not a word to my husband."—"Heaven forbid I should attempt to instruct him," said Molière, "nature has given Monsieur Beauveau an instinctive comprehension of the part, which I should spoil in attempting to mend it."

Argan is at last persuaded, that the surest and cheapest way of securing himself against the variety of maladies by which he is beset, will be to become a doctor in his own proper person. He modestly represents his want of preliminary study, and of the necessary knowledge even of the Latin language; but he is assured that by merely putting on the robe and cap of a physician, he will find himself endowed with all the knowledge necessary for exercising the profession. "What," says the patient, "will merely putting on the habit enable me to speak scholarly upon diseases?" "Assuredly," reply his advisers, "under such a garb gibberish becomes learning, and folly wisdom." This leads to the interlude which concludes the piece, being

the mock ceremonial of receiving a physician into the Esculapian college, couched in macaronic Latinity, which was afterwards introduced by Foote in the farce where Dr Last makes a figure so distinguished. Another of these interludes we may barely mention as containing one of those flashes of humour of which Molière was so lavish, that they are to be found in his most trifling productions. Such certainly is a dance in which Polichinelle (Punch, namely) is pursued in the dark by the officers of justice (archers), and puts them to flight by making a sound resembling the report of a pistol. But though this is even childishly farcical, what can be more truly comic than the exclamation of the *archers* when they rally on the unfortunate jester :—

> "Faquin, maraud, pendard, impudent, téméraire,
> Insolent, effronté, coquin, filou, voleur,
> *Vous osez nous faire peur !*"

"As the *Malade Imaginaire* was the last character in which Molière appeared, it is here necessary to say a few words upon his capacity as an actor. He bore, according to one contemporary, and with justice, the first rank among the performers of his line. He was a comedian from top to toe. He seemed to possess more voices than one, besides which every limb had its expression ;—a step in advance or retreat, a wink, a smile, a nod, expressed more in his action, than the greatest talker could explain in words in the course of an hour. He was, says another contemporary, neither corpulent nor otherwise, rather above the middle size, with a noble carriage and well-formed limbs ; he walked

with dignity, had a very serious aspect, the nose and mouth rather large, with full lips, a dark complexion, the eyebrows black and strongly marked, and a command of countenance which rendered his physiognomy formed to express comedy. A less friendly pen (that of the author of *L'In-promptu de l'Hôtel de Condé*) has caricatured Molière as coming on the stage with his head thrown habitually back, his nose turned up into the air, his hands on his sides with an affectation of negligence, and (what would seem in England a gross affectation, but which was tolerated in Paris as an expression of the *superbia quæsita meritis*) his peruke always environed by a crown of laurels. But the only real defect in his performance arose from a habitual *hoquet*, or slight hiccup, which he had acquired by attempting to render himself master of an extreme volubility of enunciation, but which his exquisite art contrived on almost all occasions successfully to disguise.

Thus externally fitted for his art, there can be no doubt that he, who possessed so much comedy in his conceptions of character, must have had equal judgment and taste in the theatrical expression, and that only the poet himself could fully convey what he alone could have composed. He performed the principal character in almost all his own pieces, and adhered to the stage even when many motives concurred to authorize his retirement.

We do not reckon it any great temptation to Molière, that the academy should have opened its arms to receive him, under condition that he would

abandon the profession of an actor; but the reason which he assigned for declining to purchase the honour at the rate proposed, is worthy of being mentioned. "What can induce you to hesitate?" said Boileau, charged by the Academicians with the negociation. "A point of honour," replied Molière. "Now," answered his friend, "what honour can lie in blacking your face with mustaches, and assuming the burlesque disguise of a buffoon, in order to be cudgelled on a public stage?" "The point of honour," answered Molière, "consists in my not deserting more than a hundred persons, whom my personal exertions are necessary to support." The Academy afterwards did honour to themselves and justice to Molière by placing his bust in their hall, with this tasteful and repentant inscription—

"Nothing is wanting to the glory of Molière. Molière was wanting to ours!"

That Molière alleged no false excuse for continuing on the stage, was evident, when, in the latter years of his life, his decaying health prompted him strongly to resign. He had been at all times of a delicate constitution, and liable to pulmonary affections, which were rather palliated than cured by submission, during long intervals, to a milk diet, and by frequenting the country, for which purpose he had a villa at Auteuil, near Paris. The malady grew more alarming from time to time, and the exertions of voice and person required by his profession tended to increase its severity. On the 17th of February, 1673, he became worse than usual; Baron, an actor of the highest rank, and of

his own training, joined with the rest of the company in remonstrating against their patron going on in the character of Argan. Molière answered them in the same spirit which dictated his reply to Boileau: "There are fifty people," he said, "who must want their daily bread, if the spectacle is put off. I should reproach myself with their distress, if I suffered them to sustain such a loss, having the power to prevent it."

He acted accordingly that evening, but suffered most cruelly in the task of disguising his sense of internal pain. A singular contrast it was betwixt the state of the actor and the fictitious character which he represented; Molière was disguising his real, and, as it proved, his dying agonies, in order to give utterance and interest to the feigned or fancied complaints of *Le Malade Imaginaire*, and repressing the voice of mortal sufferance to affect that of an imaginary hypochondriac. At length, on arriving at the concluding interlude, in which, assenting to the oath administered to him as the candidate for medical honours, in the mock ceremonial, by which he engages to administer the remedies prescribed by the ancients, whether right or wrong, and never to use any other than those approved by the college—

"Maladus dût-il crevare,
Et mori de suo malo,"

as Molière, in the character of Argan, replied *Juro*, the faculty had a full and fatal revenge. The wheel was broken at the cistern—he had fallen into a convulsive fit. The entertainment was hurried to a conclusion, and Molière was carried home. His

cough returned with violence, and he was found to have burst a blood-vessel. A priest was sent for, and two scrupulous ecclesiastics of Saint Eustace's parish distinguished themselves by refusing to administer the last consolations to a player and the author of Tartuffe. A third, of better principles, came too late,—Molière was insensible, and choked by the quantity of blood which he could not discharge. Two poor Sisters of Charity, who had often experienced his bounty, supported him as he expired.

Bigotry persecuted to the grave the lifeless relics of the man of genius. Harlai, Archbishop of Paris, who himself died of the consequences of a course of continued debauchery, thought it necessary to show himself as intolerantly strict in form as he was licentious in practice. He forbade the burial of a comedian's remains. Madame Molière went to throw herself at the feet of Louis XIV.; but, with impolitic temerity, her petition stated, that if her deceased husband had been criminal in composing and acting dramatic pieces, his Majesty, at whose command and for whose amusement he had done so, must be criminal also. This argument, though in itself unanswerable, was too bluntly stated to be favourably received; Louis dismissed the suppliant with the indifferent answer, that the matter depended on the Archbishop of Paris. The King, however, sent private orders to Harlai, to revoke the interdict against the decent burial of the man, whose talents, during his life-time, his Majesty had delighted to honour. The funeral took place accordingly, but, like that of Ophelia, " with maim-

ed rites." The curate of Saint Eustace had directions not to give his attendance, and the corpse was transported from his place of residence, and taken to the burial-ground, without being, as usual, presented at the parish-church. This was not all. A large assemblage of the lower classes seemed to threaten an interruption of the funeral ceremony. But their fanaticism was not proof against a thousand francs which the widow of Molière dispersed among them from the windows—thus purchasing for the remains of her husband an uninterrupted passage to their last abode.

In these later proceedings all readers will recognise the bigotry of the time. If, in the peculiar circumstances in which Molière died, while personating a ridiculous character, and affecting an imaginary disease, there are precisians, even in the present day, who may be disposed to regard this catastrophe as a special manifestation of the divine displeasure, we would remind them, first, of the passage in the Gospel of St Mark, strongly discountenancing such deductions; secondly, we would observe, that the benevolent motive expressed by Molière for acting upon that occasion could not be other than sincere, since bodily malady, of the severe nature under which he laboured, must have silenced personal vanity, or any less powerful reason than the one alleged; lastly, we may add, that if it be, in any circumstances, lawful to correct vice and folly by ridicule, and by an appeal to the feelings of the ludicrous which make part of our nature, the exposure of the selfish folly of the Malade Imaginaire, and of the

ignorance as well as covetousness of those who assume the robe of knowledge without either knowledge or probity, must be a lawful and a useful employment.

We have now finished with Molière's public life, which was, in many respects, one of the most triumphant, and even apparently the most happy, that a man of genius could well propose to himself. From the time he returned to Paris in 1658, till 1673 when he died, fifteen years of continued triumph had attended his literary career; and, wonderful to tell, notwithstanding the proverbial fickleness of courts and of popular audiences, Molière never for a moment appears to have lost ground in their high opinion. His most insipid pieces, such as *Mélicerte* and the like, incurred no disapprobation, they served their purpose, and were so far applauded; while those in which his own vein of wit and humour was displayed, were, in every instance, welcomed with shouts of applause at their first representation, or with universal approbation after a short interval of doubt, which must have rendered it still more flattering; like favours won from a mistress who would have refused them if she could. These were years, indeed, not of peace, —for Molière was surrounded by enemies,—but years of victorious war with enemies whom he despised, defied, and conquered. Nor were they years of ease and indolence, but a far more happy period of successful exertion. His reputation was unbounded, and his praise the theme of every tongue, from that of the Grand Monarque himself, to the meanest of his subjects.

Other men of genius have been victims to poverty and difficulties. But of these Molière knew nothing. His income, arising from his profits as manager, actor, and author, was extremely considerable, and, together with his pension, amounted to a sum amply sufficient for every purpose, whether of necessity or elegance. He was, in fact, an opulent man. This good fortune was well bestowed, for he was indefatigable in acts of charity. He sought out objects for his liberality amongst sufferers of a more modest description, and was lavish of his alms, less justifiably perhaps, to the poor whom he met in the streets. It is well remembered how, on one of these occasions, having given a piece of money to a beggar as he ascended his carriage, he was surprised to see the man come hallooing and panting after him, to tell him he had made a mistake, in giving him a piece of gold in place of some less valuable coin. "Keep the money, my friend, and accept this other piece," said Molière, "*Ou la vertu va-t-elle se nicher?*" The action, as M. Taschereau says truly, shows Molière's benevolence, and the exclamation, in finding an expression so happy for such just wonder, marks his genius.

The private circle of Molière embraced the most distinguished men of the age. La Fontaine, Boileau, the joyous Chapelle, Racine, and other names of distinction in that Augustan age of French literature, formed the society in which he commonly enjoyed his hours of leisure, and in which literature, taste, and conviviality, were happily blended. Many of the nobility had taste enough to wave the

difference of rank and to choose Molière for a companion. "Come to me at any hour you please," said the great Prince de Condé to our author, "you have but to announce your name by a valet-de-chambre, your visit can never be ill-timed."

When aristocratic pride, or more frequently private malice and wounded self-conceit, assuming the pretext of difference of rank, endeavoured to put an affront upon Molière, he usually received instant indemnification from some nobleman of better taste. Thus when the other valets-de-chambre of the royal household showed an unwillingness to assist Molière in the discharge of his office, Monsieur de Bellocq, a man of genius as well as rank, rebuked them by saying aloud to the object of their paltry spite—"Permit *me* to assist you in making the King's bed, Monsieur de Molière—I shall esteem myself honoured in having you for a companion."

Louis XIV., as we have already observed, was the constant and firm supporter of Molière. When assailed by a horrible calumny, which we will presently notice, the King showed his total disbelief by becoming godfather to one of his children. In fact, to his own great honour, he spared no opportunity of showing favour to a man whose genius he was fortunately able to appreciate. The following is a remarkable instance, occurring in the Memoirs of Madame Campan.

All the world has heard of the hearty appetite of the Grand Monarque. The liberal means which he took to appease his hunger at meal times not appearing uniformly sufficient to parry its attacks,

the King introduced a general custom, that there should be a cold fowl, or some such trifle, kept in constant readiness *en cas de nuit*—in case that his Majesty should awake hungry. The King had been informed that the officers of his household had refused to admit Molière to the table provided for them, under pretence of the inequality of his condition. He took an opportunity to correct this folly. "Molière," said he, "I am told you make bad cheer here, and I myself feel something of an appetite. Let them serve up my *en cas de nuit*." He then caused Molière to sit down, cut up the fowl, and helping his valet-de-chambre, proceeded to breakfast along with him. It was at the King's levee, so that the noblest about the court saw the society in which it pleased his Majesty to eat his meals; and it may be well believed there was no objection in future to the introduction of Molière to the table of service as it was termed.

Yet Molière had his cares and vexations; and the doom of man, born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards, was not reversed for this distinguished author. The plague and vexation arising from quarrels amongst his players, led him to exclaim, in *L'In-promptu de Versailles*,—"What a troublesome task to manage a company of players." To a young man, also, who wished to embrace the profession of an actor, and really had some talents for it, he painted his own art in the most degrading colours; described its followers as compelled to procure the countenance of the great and powerful by the most disagreeable condescensions, and conjured him to follow out the law, for which his fa-

ther had destined him, and to renounce all thoughts of the stage. There is room to believe that Molière's temper was so impatient, quick, and irritable, as to make him unusually sensible of the plagues and disappointments incidental to the situation of a manager. He was sensitively alive to the mispronunciation of his own verses; and the anecdote which M. Taschereau gives us as to his extreme agony on this subject, induces us to give credit to what is told of his impatience at any occasional want of punctuality, or accidental derangement of the business of the scene.

But Molière's greatest source of unhappiness arose from his marriage; and upon this subject, the license of his younger years became the means of subjecting him to the most cruel calumnies in his more advanced life.

During the time that Molière was travelling about in the provinces, he formed a connexion with an actress of his company, named Madelaine Bejart. This lady had been previously a favourite of the Count de Modene, by whom, in 1638, she had born a daughter, named Françoise, who is supposed to have died soon afterwards. After the amour of Madelaine Bejart and Molière had terminated, our author, in 1661, married another Bejart, whose Christian name was Armande, and who, according to M. Taschereau, was the sister of his mistress Madelaine. In this connexion there is something disgusting, and which the laws of some countries even regard as criminal. But a much more foul accusation was framed upon it. One Montfleuri, the favourite performer of a troop of

comedians, called of "l'Hôtel de Bourgogne," who were the rivals of that of Molière, extracted out of the above circumstance a most horrible and unnatural accusation, which he had the audacity to put into the form of a petition to his Majesty. According to this atrocious libel, Armande Bejart was not the sister of Molière's former mistress Madelaine, but her daughter, and the fruits of her communication with Molière himself; thus confusing her with Françoise, daughter of the Count de Modene, the fact of whose birth seemed to give some credit to the horrible assertion.

Such is the account, given by M. Taschereau, of the real family of Molière's wife. According to another hypothesis, detailed in three letters published as a supplement to the last edition of Molière's works, Armande Bejart was not the sister, but actually the daughter of Madelaine Bejart and of the Count de Modene. Under this supposition, Molière married the child of his former mistress. The subject is disgusting, and the evidence on either side very imperfect. Undoubtedly it underwent some examination at the time; for the King refused all credit to the odious imputation of Montfleuri, and, as we elsewhere hinted, showed his total incredulity on the subject, by condescending, along with the Duchess of Orleans, to stand godfather to Molière's first child,—the best refutation, certainly, which could be given to the calumny.

But this marriage was in every respect imprudent and inauspicious, and laid the foundation of his principal misfortunes. His wife was gay, beau-

tiful, and coquettish in the extreme, yet he was not able to forbear loving her with an attachment which was neither deserved nor returned. She disgraced him repeatedly by her intrigues during his lifetime, and her scandalous adventures after his death were dishonourable to his memory. The honest men whom his satire had ridiculed on account of domestic distresses of the same nature, had no doubt some feeling of internal satisfaction, when they found that the author of the *Cocu Imaginaire* shared the same apprehensions with his hero, without having the slightest reason to doubt, in his own instance, of their being founded in reality.

Leaving the consideration of his private life, checkered as it was by favourable and painful circumstances, we willingly take some general view of the character of Molière as an author, in which we feel it our duty to vindicate for him the very highest place of any who has ever distinguished himself in his department of literature. His natural disposition, his personal habits, his vivacity as a Frenchman, the depth of his knowledge of human nature, his command of a language eminent above all others for the power of expressing ludicrous images and ideas, raise him to the highest point of eminence amongst the authors of his own country and class, and assure him an easy superiority over those of every other country.

Our countrymen will perhaps ask, if we have forgotten the inimitable comic powers of our own Shakspeare. The sense of humour displayed by that extraordinary man is perhaps as remarkable as his powers of searching the human bosom for other

and deeper purposes. But if Johnson has rightly defined comedy to be a "dramatic representation of the lighter faults of mankind, with a view to make folly and vice ridiculous," it would be difficult to show that Shakspeare has dedicated to such purposes more than occasional and scattered scenes, dispersed through his numerous dramas. The *Merry Wives of Windsor* is perhaps the piece most resembling a regular comedy, yet the poetry with which it abounds is of a tone, which soars, in many respects, beyond its sphere. In most of his other compositions, his comic humour is rather an ingredient of the drama, than the point to which it is emphatically and specially directed. The scenes of Falstaff are but introduced to relieve and garnish the historical chronicle which he desired to bring on the stage. In the characters of Falconbridge and Hotspur, their peculiar humour gilds the stern features of high and lofty chivalry: in the *Tempest*, the comic touches shine upon and soften the extravagance of beautiful poetry and romantic fiction. These plays may be something higher and better, but they are not comedies dedicated to expose the vices and follies of mankind, though containing in them much that tends to that purpose. It must also be remembered, that the manners in Shakspeare (so far as his comedy depends on them) are so antiquated, that but for the deep and universal admiration with which England regards her immortal bard, and the pious care with which his works have been explained and commented upon, the follies arising out of the fashions of his time would be entirely

obsolete. We enjoy such characters as Don Armado, and even Malvolio, as we would do the pictures of Vandyke in a gallery; not that they resemble in their exterior any thing we have ever seen or could have imagined, until the excellence of the painter presented them before us, and made us own that they must have been drawn from originals, now forgotten.

The scenes of Molière, however, are painted from subjects with which our own times are acquainted; they represent follies of a former date indeed, but which have their resemblances in the present day. Some old-fashioned habits being allowed for, the personages of his drama resemble the present generation as much as our grandmother's portraits, but for hoop petticoats and commodes, resemble their descendants of the present generation. Our physicians no longer wear robes of office, or ride upon mules, but we cannot flatter ourselves that the march of intellect, as the cant phrase goes, has exploded either the *Malade Imaginaire*, or the race of grave deceivers who fattened on his folly. If, again, we look at Molière's object in all the numerous pieces which his fertile genius produced, we perceive a constant, sustained, and determined warfare against vice and folly,—sustained by means of wit and satire, without any assistance derived either from sublimity or pathos. It signified little to Molière what was the mere form which his drama assumed: whether regular comedy or comédie-ballet, whether his art worked in its regular sphere, or was pressed by fashion into the service of mummery and pantomime, its excellence was the same—

if but one phrase was uttered, that phrase was comic. Instead of sinking down to the farcical subjects which he adopted, whether by command of the king, or to sacrifice to the popular taste, Molière elevated these subjects by his treatment of them. His pen, like the hand of Midas, turned all it touched to gold; or rather, his mode of treating the most ordinary subject gave it a value such as the sculptor or engraver can confer upon clay, rock, old copper, or even cherry-stones.

It is not a little praise to this great author, that he derived none of his powers of amusement from the coarse and mean sources to which the British dramatic poets had such liberal recourse. This might, and probably did, flow in part from the good taste of the poet himself, but it was also much owing to that of Louis XIV. Whatever the private conduct of that prince, of which enough may be learned from the scandalous chronicle of the times, he knew too well *son métier de Roi*, and what was due to his dignity in public to make common jest with his subjects at any thing offensive to good morals or decorum. Charles II., on the other hand,—

"A merry monarch, scandalous and poor,"—

had been too long emancipated by his exile from all regal ceremonial, to lay his sense of humour under any restraints of delicacy. He enjoyed a broad jest, as he would have done an extra bottle of wine, without being careful about the persons who participated with him in either; and hence a personal laxity of conduct, which scandalized the

feelings of Evelyn, and a neglect of decency in public entertainments, encouraged hy the presence of the sovereign, which called down the indignation of Collier. Some comparatively trifling slips, with which the critics of the period charge Molière, form no exception to the general decorum of his writings.

Looking at their general purpose and tendency, we must be convinced that there is no comic author, of ancient or modern times, who directed his satire against such a variety of vices and follies, which, if he could not altogether extirpate, he failed not at all events to drive out of the shape and form which they had assumed.

The absurdities of *L'Etourdi*, the ridiculous jargon of the *Précieuses*, the silly quarrels of the lovers in the *Dépit Amoureux*, the absurd jealousy of husbands in *L'Ecole des Maris*, the varied fopperies and affectations of men of fashion in *Les Fâcheux*, the picture of hypocrisy in the *Tartuffe*, the exhibition at once of bizarre and untractable virtue, and of the depravity of dissimulation, in the *Misanthrope*, the effects of the dangers of misassorted alliances in *George Dandin*, of the tricks of domestics in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, of the pedantic affectation of learning in *Les Femmes Savantes*, of the dupes who take physic and the knaves who administer it in the *Malade Imaginaire*,—all these, with similar aberrations, exposed and exploded by the pen of a single author, showed that Molière possessed, in a degree superior to all other men, the falcon's piercing eye to detect vice under every veil, or folly in every shape, and the talons with

which to pounce upon either, as the natural prey of the satirist. No other writer of comedy ever soared through flights so many and so various.

We have said that the comedy of Molière never exhibits any touch of the sublime; and from its not being attempted in those more serious pieces, as *Don Garcie* and *Mélicerte*, where a high strain of poetry might have been struck to advantage, we conceive that Molière did not possess that road to the human bosom. One passage alone strikes us as approaching to a very lofty tone. Don Juan, distinguished solely by the desperation of his courage, enters the tomb of the Commander, and ridicules the fears of his servant when he tells him that the statue has nodded in answer to the invitation delivered to him by his master's command. Don Juan delivers the same invitation in person, and the statue again bends his head. Feeling a touch of the supernatural terror to which his lofty courage refuses to give way, his sole observation is, "*Allons, sortons d'ici.*" A retreat, neither alarmed nor precipitated, is all which he will allow to the terrors of such a prodigy.

In like manner, although we are informed that Molière possessed feelings of sensibility too irritable for his own happiness in private life, his writings indicate no command of the pathetic. His lovers are always gallant and witty, but never tender or ardent. This is the case, not only where the love intrigue is only a means of carrying on the business of the scene, but in *Le Dépit Amoureux*, where the ardour of affection might have gracefully mingled with the *tracasseries* of the

lovers' quarrels; and in *Psyché*, in which it is to be supposed the author would have introduced the passionate and pathetic, if he had possessed the power of painting it. Nor do any of his personages, in all the distresses in which the scene places them, ever make a strong impression on the feelings of the audience, who are only amused by the ludicrous situations to which the distresses give rise. The detected villainy of Tartuffe affects the feelings indeed strongly, but it is more from the gratification of honest resentment against a detected miscreant, than from any interest we take in the fortunes of the duped Orgon.

Neither did Molière ornament his dramatic pieces with poetical imagery, whether descriptive or moral. His mode of writing excluded the "morning sun, and all about gilding the eastern horizon." He wrote to the understanding, and not to the fancy, and was probably aware, moreover, that such poetical ornaments, however elegant when under the direction of good taste, are apt to glide into the opposite extreme, and to lead to that which Molière regarded as the greatest fault in composition, an affectation of finery approaching to the language of the *Précieuses Ridicules*. Alceste, in *Le Misanthrope*, expresses the opinion of the author on this subject:

> "Ce style figuré, dont on se fait vanité,
> Sort de bon caractère, et de la verité,
> Ce n'est que jeu de mots, qu'affectation pure,
> Et ce n'est point ainsi que parle la nature.
> Le méchant gout du siècle en cela me fait peur,
> Nos pères tout grossiers l'avoient beaucoup meilleur."

In what, therefore, it may be asked, consisted the excellence of this entertaining writer, whose

works, as often as we have opened a volume during the composition of this slight article, we have found it impossible to lay out of our hand until we had completed a scene, however little to our immediate purpose of consulting it? If Molière did not possess, or at least has not exercised the powers of the sublime, the pathetic, or the imaginative in poetry, from whence do his works derive their undisputed and almost universal power of charming? We reply, from their truth and from their simplicity; from the powerful and penetrating view of human nature, which could strip folly and vice of all their disguise, and expose them to laughter and scorn when they most hoped for honour and respect; also, from the extreme *naïveté* as well as force of the expressions which effect the author's purpose. A father consults his friends about the deep melancholy into which his daughter is fallen: one advises to procure for her a handsome piece of plate, beautifully sculptured, as an object which cannot fail to give pleasure to the most disconsolate mind. The celebrated answer, *vous êtes orfèvre, Monsieur Josse*, at once unmasks the private views of the selfish adviser, and has afforded a measure by which all men, from Molière's time to our own, may judge of the disinterested character of such friendly counsels. This short, dry, sudden and unexpected humour of Molière, seconded as it always is by the soundest good sense, is one great proof of his knowledge of his art. The tragic may be greatly enlivened by some previous preparation, as the advance of a mighty host, with its ensigns displayed, has, even

at a distance, an effect upon the nerves of those whom it is about to assail. But wit is most successful when it bursts from an unexpected ambush, and carries its point by surprise. The best jest will lose its effect on the stage, if so much preparation is employed as leads the spectator to anticipate what is coming, as it will suffer in society if introduced with the preface of "I'll tell you a good thing!" In this species of surprise Molière surpasses every writer of comedy, but the jest at which you laugh springs as naturally out of the subject, as if it had been obvious to your apprehension from the very commencement of the scene. A brief sentence, a word, even an exclamation, is often sufficient to produce the full effect of the ludicrous, as a spark will spring a mine, in the place and time when the explosion is least suspected. The most unexpected means in the hands of this great artist are also the most certain; and you are first made sensible of what he has aimed at, when you admire his arrow quivering in the centre of the mark.

The depth and force of Molière's common sense is equally remarkable in displaying his own just and sound opinions, as in exposing the false taste and affectation of others. Ariste, Philinte, and the other personages of his drama, to whom (as the ancients did to their choruses) he has ascribed the task of moralizing upon the subject of the scene, and expressing the sentiments which must be supposed those of the author himself, have all the firmness, strength, and simplicity, proper to the enunciation of truth and wisdom; and much more

of both will be found within the precincts of Molière's works, than in the formal lessons of men of less acute capacity.

Molière himself knew the force and value of his simplicity, although sometimes objected to by fastidious critics as hurrying him into occasional vulgarity. In order that he might not depart from it, he adopted the well-known practice of reading his pieces, while in manuscript, to his housekeeper, La Foret, and observing the effect they produced on so plain, but shrewd and sensible a mind, before bringing them on the stage. The habit of being called into consultations of this kind, had given the good dame such an accurate tact, that it was in vain that Molière tried to pass upon her the composition of another poet for his own. The circumstance proves how well she deserved to sit in the chair of censorship which her master had assigned her. Mons. Taschereau thinks, that the opinion of La Foret was only demanded by Molière upon low and farcical subjects. But though we allow that some parts of his higher comedy might be above her sphere, we can easily conceive, that the author might have an interest in knowing exactly how much his housekeeper—at once an exact and favourable specimen of a great majority of his audiences—might be able to comprehend of his higher comedy, and in what particulars it was elevated beyond the line of her understanding. Nor is it unreasonable to conceive, that an author who desired above all other things to be generally understood, should have paused on the passages which La Foret comprehended less perfectly, and omitted

or explained what was like to prove *caviare* to the multitude. It would not be perhaps unnatural to suppose, that to the shrewd, frank, acute, and penetrating character of Molière's housekeeper we owe the original idea of those clever and faithful, but caustic and satirical female domestics, the Toinettes and Nicoles, whom he has produced on the stage with so much effect.

We must now take our leave of M. Taschereau, to whose entertaining work we are obliged for so much instruction or amusement. Some readers may be disappointed, that, after pronouncing Molière the prince of the writers of comedy, we should have limited the talents by which he attained such pre-eminence to the possession of common sense, however sound—of observation, however acute—and of expression, however forcible, true, and simple. It is not, however, by talents of a different class from those enjoyed by the rest of humanity that the ingredients which form great men are constituted; on the contrary, such peculiar tastes and talents only produce singularity. The real source of greatness, in almost every department, is an extraordinary proportion of some distinguishing quality proper to all mankind; and of which, therefore, all mankind, less or more, comprehends the character and the value. A man with four arms would be a monster for romance, or for a show; it is the individual that can best make use of the ordinary conformation of his body who obtains a superiority over his fellow-creatures by strength or agility. In a word, the general qualities of sound judgment, clear views, and powerful expression of what is

distinctly perceived, acquire the same value, as they rise in degree above the general capacity of humanity, with that obtained by diamonds, which in proportion to their weight in carats become almost inestimable, while the smaller sparks of the same precious substance are of ordinary occurrence, and held comparatively in slight esteem.

ARTICLE VIII.

CHATTERTON.

[*From the Edinburgh Review, April*, 1804. *On* "*The Works of* THOMAS CHATTERTON; *containing his Life, by* G. GREGORY, D.D., *and Miscellaneous Poems.* 3 *vols.* 8*vo.* London, 1803.]

THE works of Chatterton, whose life and death will be the lasting honour and indelible disgrace of the eighteenth century, are at length, after the lapse of more than thirty years, edited in a collected state. We were at some loss to conceive what could have occasioned the long delay of so interesting a publication; and the explanation has proved rather mortifying. *A priori*, such a work seemed particularly calculated to engage the public

attention. To the internal merit of the poems, now at length published, is united all the interest excited by the romantic history and lamentable death of the wonderful author, as well as that which arises from the exercise of critical investigation, and the ardour of literary controversy. Nevertheless, the delay may be attended by its own advantages in aiding us to ascertain the real merits of the disputed question. The works of Chatterton, or the poems of Rowley, have survived the controversy which attended their appearance in 1770. Of the assailants and defenders of their originality, many have paid the debt to nature, and others will remember their ardour in the contest as the emotions of an agitating dream.[1] It may therefore be supposed that the public will coolly and impartially determine the controversy (if it yet remains a controversy) upon the solid grounds of evidence; and it might also have been hoped, that circumstances of additional proof, suppressed or misrepresented while the feelings of being duped were yet too acute, might now have been recovered. We will endeavour to show how far we have been gratified by the present edition, and in what respects it has fallen short of our expectation.

The preface bears the well-known and respectable name of Mr Robert Southey; but we are informed that so much of the business has devolved upon Mr Cottle, that it becomes necessary to use the term editors in the plural. Both poets, and

[1] [See at the end of vol. iii., *Life and Works of Chatterton*, a Catalogue *raisonnée* of Twenty-eight Publications relating to the Controversy. 1772–1795.]

both natives of Bristol, we may suppose that these gentlemen felt a deep and peculiar interest in the task they have undertaken, of rendering a just homage to the genius of their wonderful fellow-citizen, and of contributing to the interest of his surviving relation. The purposes to which the profits of the publication are dedicated, are thus expressed in the preface; and the circumstances, while they do honour to the liberality of the editors and publishers, account for the delay of which we have complained, in a manner deeply disgraceful to the taste and feelings of the public.

"In the winter of 1799, a subscription edition of the works of Chatterton was publicly proposed for his sister's benefit. These works had hitherto been published only for the emolument of strangers, who procured them by gift or purchase from the author himself, or pilfered them from his family. From the interest which these circumstances, and the whole of Chatterton's history had excited, more success was expected than has been found. At the end of two years, the subscription would not have defrayed the costs of publication. An arrangement was then made with Messrs Longman and Rees, who have published the work at their own expense, and allowed Mrs Newton a handsome number of copies, with a reversionary interest in any future edition."

The friends and patrons of Chatterton, as well as the former collectors of his poems, have been liberal in their communications to the present editors; and the book accordingly contains many of his productions which have been hitherto inedited. We do not aver that, in general, these additions to his works tend to augment his fame; on the contrary, as some of them have been written almost during infancy, as others are merely unfinished fragments, and as all seem incorrect and

hasty productions, we cannot but consider them as far inferior to the poems ascribed to Rowley, and even to those which Chatterton was himself pleased to own during his life. But, in another point of view, these early and unfinished compositions are very interesting. In Chatterton, above all other poets, we would wish not merely to admire the works upon which he may safely rest his claim to immortal fame, but also to investigate the performances in which his exertions have been less successful; and, by comparing them together, to form, if it be possible, some idea of the strength and weakness of this prodigy of early talent. We therefore approve of publishing such pieces as *Sly Dick* and *Apostate Will*, which display the early satirical propensities of young Chatterton; with the elegies, songs, and burlettas, by which he endeavoured rather to supply his necessities, and postpone the dreadful crisis of his fate, than to indulge his genius, or extend his poetical fame. One of his juvenile productions, now published for the first time, is a hymn for Christmas-day, which, if really written about the age of eleven, bears ample testimony to the premature powers of the author. We extract a verse or two, which, when the harmony and ease of expression are contrasted with the author's boyhood, inexperience, and want of instruction, appear almost miraculous.

"Almighty Framer of the skies,
O let our pure devotion rise
Like incense in thy sight!
Wrapt in impenetrable shade,
The texture of our souls were made,
Till thy command gave light.

The Sun of glory gleamed, the ray
Refined the darkness into day,
And bid the vapours fly:
Impelled by His eternal love,
He left his palaces above,
To cheer our gloomy sky.

How shall we celebrate the day,
When God appeared in mortal clay,
The mark of worldly scorn.
When the Archangels' heavenly lays
Attempted the Redeemer's praise,
And hailed Salvation's morn?

A humble form the Godhead wore,
The pains of poverty he bore,
To gaudy pomp unknown:
Tho' in a human walk he trod,
Still was the man Almighty God,
In glory all his own.

Despised, oppressed, the Godhead bears
The torments of this vale of tears,
Nor bid his vengeance rise:
He saw the creatures he had made
Revile his power, his peace invade,
He saw with mercy's eyes."

Such was the early command of language displayed by a child, who, when a beardless youth, was to gull a whole synod of grizzled deans and antiquaries.

The life of Chatterton, prefixed to these volumes, was written by Dr Gregory of London, for the *Biographia Britannica*, and, by his permission, has been reprinted upon this occasion. Although it seems to be compiled with great fidelity, and probably contains all the material facts known upon the subject, we cannot suppress our hearty wish, that either of the present editors had himself under-

taken the task of Chatterton's biographer. Many observations must have occurred to them while preparing these volumes for the press, which have escaped Dr Gregory, writing many years ago, and for a more limited purpose. This was the more incumbent upon the editors, because, from persons of poetical taste, so long employed in examining Chatterton's productions, the public must have expected some light upon the Rowleian controversy. Dr Gregory, unwilling, or unable to form a judgment upon this most important point of the life of the youthful poet, has arranged, with great impartiality, the arguments upon both sides, in battle array against each other, leaving his reader to draw such conclusions as his own taste or judgment may enable him to form. Now, this might be very excusable, in the original circumstances in which Dr Gregory's life of Chatterton was published; for the *Biographia Britannica* is not a natural field for literary controversy, though often occupied as such. But in publishing a formal edition of the whole works of Chatterton, in which those articles ascribed to Rowley are included, the public had a right to expect from the editors, their full sentiments upon the point of most essential interest to their author's fame, especially as Mr Cottle, at least, has formed and expressed a decided opinion upon the subject. Besides, without depreciating the labours of Dr Gregory, who has produced a plain and simple account of Chatterton's life, we must express ourselves disappointed, that we have not, from the hand of a poet like Southey, a memorial of his ill-fated brother bard. Few subjects of com-

position, equally affecting or elevating, can ever occur; for when we consider the strange ambiguity of Chatterton's character, his attainments under circumstances incalculably disadvantageous, and his wish to disguise them under the name of another; his high spirit of independence, and the ready versatility with which he stooped to the meanest political or literary drudgery; the amiable and interesting affection which he displays towards his family, with a certain looseness of morality which approaches to profligacy,—we cannot but regret that a subject, uniting so strong an alternation of light and shade, had not been sketched by the hand of a master. We will not suppose that Mr Southey, or his brother editor, retreated from the task of becoming Chatterton's biographer through mere indolence; for, the liberality of their purpose towards his sister, is a pledge to us, that they would not readily "wax weary in well-doing." We content ourselves with lamenting that any reason should have occurred to deprive us of the satisfaction which we would have reaped in seeing a new life of Chatterton, with a full view of the Rowley controversy, upon which, in many particulars, the book before us, and the detached notes of the editors, throw so much light. One general remark we cannot help deducing from the melancholy picture of the life before us. The inconsistencies of Chatterton's conduct and character may be, in some measure, ascribed to his situation and extreme youth; yet we fear their original source was in that inequality of spirits[1] with which providence, as in

[1] [Mrs Newton, sister of Chatterton, says, "he had been

mockery of the most splendid gifts of genius and fancy, has often conjoined them. This strange disorder of the mind, often confounded by the vulgar with actual insanity, of which perhaps it is a remote shade, is fostered by the workings of an ardent imagination as it is checked and subdued by mathematical or philosophical research. It is reconcilable (as is actual insanity) with the exertion of the greatest address in gaining a particular point, or in imposing upon the rest of mankind. In both cases, the object to be attained is usually, in the eyes of the world, either altogether undesirable, or totally inadequate to the trouble and address expended in attaining it. This disease (for such it is, and of a dreadful complexion) may also, like the extremity of mental derangement, be admitted to palliate the deviations from truth and moral rectitude, which it is peculiarly apt to occasion. Without considering the forgery of Rowley's poems in so heinous a light as if they had been a bill or bond, and pecuniary advantage the object of the fraud, we cannot regard the imposture as of an indifferent or harmless nature. Neither was the end proposed, being apparently the mere internal satisfaction of imposing upon the world, or, at best, the sullen obstinacy of maintaining an assertion

gloomy from the time he began to learn, but we remarked he was more cheerful after he began to write poetry." "His spirits were rather uneven, sometimes so gloomy, that for many days together he would say but very little, and that by constraint. At other times exceedingly cheerful." "We heard him frequently say that he found he studied best toward the full of the moon; and would often sit up all night and write by moonlight."—*Letter to Rev. H. Croft.* Works, vol. iii. pp. 461–463.]

which had been hastily made, apparently adequate to the immense labour necessary to sustain the credit of Rowley. But the ardent mind of Chatterton, who had pitched the standard of his honour on this particular ground, urged him to maintain it at the sacrifice of the poetical reputation he might have acquired by renouncing a phantom of his imagination, and at the yet more important dereliction of personal truth and moral rectitude.

The alternate fits of melancholy and bursts of high spirits which Chatterton manifested; the strange paper entitled his *will*, in which, with a mixture of levity, of bitter satire and actual despair, he announces a purpose of self-destruction;[1] above all, the extravagant hopes which marked his arrival in London, and the suicide which finally closed his short and eventful career,—all announce to us that irregular ambition, and impatience of the natural progress of society, which indicate an inflamed imagination and a precarious judgment.

Before leaving the life of Chatterton, we must intimate, that we are somewhat displeased with the recommendatory and laudatory scraps of verse and prose which, in revival of a good old custom, are tacked to the works of the author. Dr Vicesimus Knox leads the van with a heavy and dolorous imitation of Sterne (which lumbers along like Mr

[1] ["Being sound in body, or it is the fault of my last surgeon; the soundness of my mind, the coroner and jury are to be judges of, desiring them to take notice, that the most perfect masters of human nature in Bristol distinguish me by the title of the Mad Genius; therefore, if I do a mad action, it is conformable to every action of my life, which savoured of insanity," &c. &c. &c. Vol. iii. p. 451.]

Shandy's chaise when it was dragged into Lyons without the wheels), followed in sorrowful procession by the Laureate, by Mrs Cowley, Mrs Robinson, Miss Helen Maria Williams, Mr Herbert Croft, and other persons (as the newspapers have it) of talent and distinction. We confess that we think Chatterton little honoured by their tribute of mawkish and affected sympathy. It is disgusting to hear blue-stocking ladies jingle their rhymes, and pedantic schoolmasters pipe upon their sentimental whistles a dirge over the grave of departed genius. We except from this censure a monody of Mr Coleridge, which, though very unequal, and carelessly executed, exhibits in many passages the feeling and poetical talent which that gentleman always possesses, and sometimes chooses to display. We also except some verses by Mr Hayley, the subject having raised him on this occasion considerably above the cold, correct mediocrity of his usual tone of poetry.

The poems of Chatterton may be divided into two grand classes—those ascribed to Rowley; for surely, to use Mr Cottle's expression, it is time to pluck the borrowed plumes from the fictitious monk, and to place them on the brow of the real poet;—and those which the bard of Bristol avowed to be his own composition. Of these classes, the former is incalculably superior to the latter in poetical powers and diction. This is a remarkable circumstance, and forms, we think, the only forcible argument in support of the existence and claims of Rowley. But there is a satisfactory answer, founded upon more than one reason, for the infe-

riority betwixt the avowed and concealed productions of Chatterton. He produced those antiquated poems which he ascribed to Rowley when a youth of sixteen; and his education had been so limited, that his general acquirements were beneath those of boys of the same age, since he was neither acquainted with French nor Latin. If, therefore, there is other evidence to prove that the poems of Rowley were his own composition, it follows, that the whole powers and energies of his extraordinary talents must have been converted to the acquisition of the obsolete language, and peculiar style necessary to support this deep laid deception. He could have no time for the study of our modern poets, their rules of verse, or modes of expression, while his whole faculties were intensely employed in the herculean task of creating the person, history, and language of an ancient poet, which, vast as these faculties were, was surely sufficient wholly to engross, though not to overburden them. When, therefore, due time is allowed for a boy of sixteen to have acquired the astonishing skill "in antique lore" necessary to the execution of this great project, it will readily be allowed that he must have come to the composition of modern poetry a mere novice, destitute of all adventitious support, and relying only on the strength of his own genius, which, powerful as it was, had hitherto been used in a different and somewhat inconsistent direction. In the poems of Rowley, therefore, we read the exertions of Chatterton in the line of his own choice, aided by all the information which his researches had enabled him to procure, and stimulated by his favourite

ambition of imposing upon the literary world; but, in his modern poems, he is engaged in a style of composition to which he was comparatively a stranger, and to which the bent of his mind and turn of his studies had not naturally inclined him. Although this argument seems to account, in a manner sufficiently satisfactory, for the inequality of those productions in which Chatterton has thrown aside the mask of Rowley, it is not the only one which can be offered. Let it be remembered, that, admitting Chatterton to be engaged in a deception, he had pledged himself to maintain it; he was therefore carefully to avoid whatever might tend to remove the veil which he had spread over it; and such was his firmness of perseverance, that he seems to attest the originality of Rowley, even in the *will* which he wrote before his projected suicide.[1] Without therefore supposing that he had *under-*

[1] This circumstance is much founded on by the believers. To us it only affords an additional proof of the unconquerable and haughty perseverance of Chatterton's character. We attach no implicit faith to dying declarations; for, upon points in which fame is implicated, the voice of the passions is heard even in the hour of death. We disclaim every application of the illustration which can be disrespectful to the memory of Chatterton; but it is well known, that criminals, whose crimes are not of a nature to meet public sympathy, often at their death endeavour, by a denial of guilt most satisfactorily proved, to avert the odium attached to their persons and memory. It may be thought that Chatterton would have better consulted his own fame, by avowing these beautiful poems; but the pride of every one is not sustained by the same nutriment. He probably deprecated the doubtful fame of an ingenious but detected impostor, and preferred the internal consciousness, that, by persisting in the deception he had commenced, future ages might venerate the poems of Chatterton, under patronage of the fictitious Rowley.

written his own poems, in order to set off those of Rowley, it is obvious, that the former must have been executed under a degree of embarrassment highly unfavourable to poetical composition. As Rowley, Chatterton had put forth his whole strength, and exerted himself to the utmost, in describing those scenes of antique splendour which captivated his imagination so strongly. But when he wrote in his own character, he was under the necessity of avoiding every idea, subject, or expression, however favourite, which could tend to identify the style of Chatterton with that of Rowley; and surely it is no more to be expected that, thus cramped and trammelled, he should equal his unrestrained efforts, than that a man should exert the same speed with fetters on his limbs, as if they were at liberty.

Let it be further considered, that there exist persons to whom nature has granted the talent of mimicking, not merely the voice and gesture, but the expression, ideas, and manner of thinking of others, and who, speaking in an assumed character, display a fire and genius which evaporates when they resume their own. In like manner, Chatterton, with all his wonderful powers, appears, from the habit of writing as a fictitious personage, and in a strangely antiquated dialect, to have in some degree formed a character to his supposed Rowley, superior to what he was able to maintain in his own person when his disguise was laid aside. The veil of antiquity, also,—the hard, and often inexplicable phrases, which he felt himself at liberty to use under his assumed character of a poet of the fifteenth

century, serve, in a considerable degree, to blind and impose upon the reader, who does not find himself entitled to condemn what he does not understand, and who is inclined, from the eminent beauty of many passages, to extend his gratuitous admiration to those which are less intelligible. But, when writing in modern English, the advantage is lost; and we are often shocked with a bald and prosaic tautology, with bombast, and with coarseness of expression—all the defects, not of Chatterton's natural genius, but of his extreme youth and deficient education; and many instances of which will be found to exist by curious enquirers, even under the seemly and antique *Alban* of the *Deigne Thomas Rowleie, Preiste of St Johans, Bristowe.*

When the believers in Rowley are driven from this strong ward, we apprehend they can hardly make good their footing in any other. Two or three gentlemen, companions of Chatterton while at school, have ventured to give it as their decided opinion, that, according to their estimation of his talents, he was unable to compose the poems of Rowley. Mr Cottle treats with well-merited contempt the evidence of these persons, who, from recollection of an opinion formed while schoolboys, conceive the plummet of their understanding adequate to fathom the depth of Chatterton's genius. A list is given of the parchments which have been produced as remnants of Rowley's MSS.; all of which, from the shape and texture, as well as from the handwriting, are very evidently forgeries by the unfortunate young man from whom they were recovered.

Above all, the internal evidence arising from the poems themselves, has always appeared to us to convey decisive marks of modern origin. The smoothness of the verse,—which, in most cases, resembles the most correct modern poetry,—as well as the complicated nature of the stanza, are highly suspicious. It is no doubt true, that, in some compositions of a lyrical nature, the old English poets attained a considerable degree of ease and fluency, chiefly such as were adapted to the music of the minstrels, when the necessity of following the tune, compelled the poet to observe a regularity of rhythm. Such, for example, are the poems of Lawrence Minot. But these poems are flimsy songs, in which the same idea, and often the same words, are repeated and chimed upon, in order to attain the necessary smoothness. Take, for example, a verse of Minot, which, for the sake of the uninitiated, we have stripped of the antique spelling:—

"Sir David the Bruce
Was at distance,
When Edward the Baliolfe
Rode with his lance;
The north end of England
Teached him to dance.
When he was met on the moor,
With mikell mischaunce,
Sir Philip the valayse
Might not him advance;
The flowers that fair were
Ar fallen in France;
The flowers are now fallen,
That fair were and fell;
A boar with his battaille
Has don them to dwell."

The ease of these lines is the smoothness of mere

ballad, attained by the tenuity of idea, and the tautology of expression. But the smoothness of Rowley is combined with all the graces and refinement of modern poetry. Take two stanzas at hazard, divested of the artificial *patina*, or rust, of antique orthography:—

"The sun was gleaming in the midst of day,
Dead-still the air, and eke the welkin blue,
When from the sea arose, in drear array,
A heap of clouds, of sable, sullen hue,
The which full fast unto the woodland drew,
Hiding at once the sunnes festive face;
And the black tempest swell'd, and gather'd up apace.

— — — — — —

The gather'd storm is ripe; the big drops fall;
The sun-burnt meadows smoke, and drink the rain;
The coming *ghastness* doth the cattle 'pal;
And the full flockes are driving o'er the plain.
Dash'd from the clouds the waters fly again,
The welkin opes, the yellow levin flies,
And the hot fiery steam in the wide flashing dies."

Can any one read this beautiful description of a landscape overshaded by a thunder storm, and doubt for a moment that it is by a modern hand?—yet we have only discarded *hiltring*, *fetyve*, *forswat*, and *smothe*, all other differences betwixt our copy and the text being merely in spelling. Chatterton's answer to the strong objection arising from the smoothness of Rowley's poetry, when stated to him by Horace Walpole, is very remarkable,—"The harmony is not so extraordinary, as Joseph Iscam is altogether as harmonious." Now, as Joseph Iscam is equally a person of dubious existence, this is a curious instance of *placing the elephant upon the tortoise*. It is not our wish to engage farther in the controversy. If any one resists the internal

evidence of the style of Rowley's poems, we make him welcome to the rest of the argument; to his belief that the Saxons imported heraldry, and gave armorial bearings (which were not known till the time of the Crusades); that Mr Robert Canning, in the reign of Edward IV., encouraged drawing, and had private theatricals; that Mr Burgum, the pewterer of Bristol, derived his descent from Simon de Leyncte Lyze, *alias* Senlez, who married Matilda, daughter of Waltheof, Earl of Northumberland, Northampton, and Huntingdon; that Mr Stephens of Salisbury drew his ancestry from Od, Earl of Blois and Holderness, who flourished about 1095; and that Chatterton himself represented the Sieur de Chasteautonne, of the house of Rollo, the first Duke of Normandy;—

> Quibus si credideris,
> Expectare poteris
> Arthurum cum Britonibus.

Nothing can be more extraordinary than the delight which Chatterton appears to have felt in executing these numberless and multifarious impositions. His ruling passion was not the vanity of a poet who depends upon the opinion of others for its gratification, but the stoical pride of talent, which felt nourishment in the solitary contemplation of superiority over the dupes who fell into his toils. He has himself described this leading feature of his character in a letter to Mr Barret.

"It is my pride, my damned, native, unconquerable pride, that plunges me into distraction. You must know that 19-20th of my composition is pride. I must either live a slave—a servant—have no will of my own which I may fairly declare as such, or DIE."—Vol. iii. p. 419.

The art and avidity with which the youthful poet seized every opportunity, "through an excess of ingenuity in a literary sense, *to impose on the credulity of others*," is justly remarked by Mr Cottle to be "the predominant quality which elucidates his character, and is deserving of minute regard by all who attempt to decide on the Rowleian controversy." We shall extract the instances, which the editor has brought together, forming a curious picture of a most active and powerful mind, imbued with a strange rage for the practice of literary imposture:—

"I. A *new bridge* is just completed over the Avon at Bristol, —Chatterton sends to the printer a description of the passing over the *old bridge*, for the first time, in the thirteenth century; on which occasion two songs are sung by two saints, of whom nobody ever heard, and in language precisely the same as Rowley's, although he lived two hundred years after the event was said to have taken place.

"II. Mr Burgum is a man attached to heraldic honours.—Chatterton gives him his pedigree from the time of William the Conqueror, and allies him to some of the most ancient families in the kingdom!

"III. Mr Burgum is one of the first persons who expresses an opinion of the authenticity and excellence of Rowley's poems. Chatterton, pleased with this first blossom of credulity, and from which he presaged an abundant harvest, with an elated and grateful heart, presents him with the *Romaunt of the Cynghte*, a poem, written by 'JOHN DE BERCHAM,' one of *his own* ancestors, about four hundred and fifty years before; and the more effectually to exclude suspicion, he accompanies it with the same poem, modernized by himself.

"IV. Chatterton wishes to obtain the good opinion of his relation, Mr Stephens of Salisbury, and, from something, which it is possible his keen observation had remarked in Mr Stephens, he deems it the most effectual way, by informing him that he is descended from Fitz-Stephen, grandson of the venerable Od, Earl of Blois, and Lord of Holderness, who flourished about the year 1095!

"V. Mr Catcott is a worthy and religious man; and who from never intending to deceive, suspects no deception in others. —Chatterton, who is a skilful engineer, adapts the nature of his attack to the strength of the fortress, and gives him an ancient fragment of a sermon on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, as *wroten* by THOMAS ROWLEY!

"VI. Mr Barrett is zealous to prove the antiquity of Bristol. —As a demonstrable evidence, Chatterton sends him an escutcheon (on the authority of the same Thomas Rowley) borne by a Saxon of the name of Ailward, who resided in *Bristow* in the year 718!

"VII. Mr Barrett is also writing a comprehensive history of Bristol, and is solicitous to obtain all possible information concerning it.—Chatterton seizes the opportunity, and presents him, at *different times*, with an account of all the churches and chapels of Bristol, as they appeared three hundred years before, and accompanies it with drawings and descriptions of the castle; the whole of this information being unsupported by either document or tradition, and resting alone on the evidence of 'the gode prieste *Thomas Rowley*,' between whom and *Thomas Chatterton*, prejudice itself must allow, there was a great equality of talent, as well as a great similitude of pursuits. They were both poets, both antiquarians, and both perpetually adverting to heraldry.

"VIII. Public curiosity and general admiration are excited by translations from the Erse of Ossian.—Chatterton, who gave precedence to none in 'catching the manners living as they rise,' publishes a succession of poems from the *Saxon* and *Welch*, indifferent to the inconsistency, or otherwise not aware, that he had professedly translated works in the *same* style, and with the *same* imagery, from the TEUTONIC and CELTIC, two languages of different origin and genius, and whose poetry, of all their writings, has ever been considered as the most dissimilar.

"IX. Mr Walpole is writing the history of British painters.—Chatterton (who, to a confidential friend, had before expressed an opinion that it was *possible*, by judicious management, to deceive even this master in antiquities), with full confidence, sends him an account of eminent 'Carvellers' and 'Peyncters, and informs him of others who once flourished in BRISTOL! but of whom the present inhabitants of Bristol never heard!

"But these are all subordinate deceptions. Chatterton's ambition embraced a larger range, and was circumscribed by no other limit, than, in the person of Rowley, of deceiving the whole world. And, that he succeeded in a great and unaccountable degree, is attested by the voluminous controversies of

antiquarians, historians, and poets. The object bespoke the comprehension of his mind; and its partial success is a lasting monument of what perseverance may effect when supported by genius."—P. 509–514.

This curious detail of repeated imposture, regularly executed at the time when circumstances appeared to give an opening for them, may surely suffice to excite the suspicion of the most credulous believer in Rowley. Alike a forger of style, of MSS., and of drawings, nothing escaped the imitation of a youth, born as it were with the rare talents of executing such multiplied deceptions, and with a temper framed to delight in his success, which it may be hoped is still rarer. Of the merit of the Rowley poems, in a critical point of view, it is not here the place, or now the time to speak. They have been long subjected to the public; and in spite of their being written in a dialect which resembles the ancient or modern language of England, hardly more nearly than the vocabulary of George Psalmanazar did that of Formosa, they have been ever esteemed compositions of the highest merit. The drama called *Ella*, many parts of the *Battle of Hastings*, the *Ballad of Charity*, that of *Sir Charles Bawdin* (which somewhat resembles the antique style of minstrel poetry), the *Dirge*, and several of the *Eclogues*, may rank with the labours of our most distinguished poets. Pity it is, that the circumstances and temper of the author combined to shorten a life distinguished by such works of excellence during its limited career.

The poems avowed by Chatterton were, with a few exceptions, satirical or amatory. In the former

line, his inclination for severity is more remarkable than his success. Perhaps he adopted this style of composition, not only in compliance with a natural acerbity of temper aggravated by his dependent situation, but also as most remote from the walk of the moral and heroic Rowley. Satire, however, in a polished age, requires more than mere genius and the force of numbers. General invective, however coarse and vehement, falls heavily to the ground, unless sharpened and guided by that accurate and discriminating knowledge of men and manners which is not often acquired in early youth, or easily obtained in obscure circumstances. The personal reflections which his satires level against those persons in Bristol to whom Chatterton is admitted to have owed the deepest obligations, do little honour to their author. We hardly know whether to laugh or grieve, when he reproaches Catcott, down whose throat he had crammed the improbable tale of Rowley, with gross *credulity*, because he was a believer in revelation! The amatory poems are pretty much what might have been expected from his declared intention "of making acquaintance with a girl in the neighbourhood, supposing it might soften the austerity of temper study had occasioned." Accordingly, "he wrote a poem to her, and they commenced corresponding acquaintance." Little was to be expected from verses written by a lover who had adopted his sentiments of preference *pour se desennuyer*. In some of his other poems, particularly the elegy upon Mr Fairford, traces are remarked, by Dr Gregory, of the descriptive and personifying powers exerted in the poems of Rowley.

Of Chatterton's prose pieces, the less that is said, the kinder we shall be to his reputation. In the essays which he wrote for periodical publications, as, *The Hunter of Oddities*, *Adventures of a Slave*, and the like, he displays little humour, and great inclination to substitute in its place personal abuse and private slander. The imitations of Ossian, published as translations from the Saxon, are not only utterly incongruous with the style of the language from which he pretended to have rendered them, but are incalculably inferior to the sophisticated productions of Macpherson. This is not to be wondered at. Macpherson, with powers infinitely inferior to those of Chatterton, had the advantage of an intimate acquaintance with the Celtic poetry, much of which he probably interweaved with his own imitations. The bard of Bristol had only Macpherson to study; and, at an age when bombast is seldom distinguished from sublime, he caricatured, in his Saxon poems, the worst passages of the Pseudo-Ossian.

The present edition contains many prose imitations of the antique, published from Chatterton's MSS. in the British Museum. These are very important, as throwing light upon the Rowleian poems. Some curious passages occur in these documents. While Chatterton wrote plain narrative, he imitated, with considerable success, the dry, concise style of an antique annalist; but when any thing required a more dignified or sentimental style, he mounted the fatal and easily recognised car of the son of Fingal. Thus, in an account of St Marie Magdalene's chapelle, after informing us it "was ybuilden bie Elle, warden of the castle

near Elle-gate, Sythina clessen, New-gate—yn this chapelle was ysworne a treatye betweene Goddwynne Erle or Abthane of Kent, Harold eftsoons Kynge of England," &c. &c.; he of a sudden thus changes his tone in commemorating his favourite Elle—" Elle, descended from the kyngelie bloude of Mercyans, raged in the fyghte like a wilde boare in the woode; drearie as a blacke cloude yn ungentle wedder he sweept whole rankes to helle. Lyke to the castle of Bryghstowe was his mind gentle and meeke," &c. &c. Again, in a very sober narrative of the *Ryse of Peyncteyne in Englande*, written by Rowley for his friend Cannynge, after a sort of matter of fact account of various artists, we come to one called *Aflem, a notable perfourmer of the counynge mysterie of steineynge glass.* This person was taken by the Danes, and ordered to be slain. The Dane to whom the execution was intrusted, discovered Aflem to be his brother. At this crisis, Rowley tucks up his monkish frock, and mounts the Celtic Pegasus. " Affrighte chaynede uppe hys soule; ghastnesse dwelled yn his breaste. Oscarre"—(a name of some import, as proving the existing idea in the mind of the author)—" Oscarre, the great Dane, gave histe he should be forslagen; no teares colde availe; the morning, cladde in robes of ghastnesse, was come," &c. &c. An instance of a curious mistake committed by Chatterton, occurs in these excerpts from the Pseudo-Rowley prose writings. In a MS. in Chatterton's handwriting, in the Museum, there occur several excerpts from Chaucer, apparently culled to bolster out some intended imitations. Among others we find the two lines

respecting the mormal on the leg of the pilgrim's cook.

> "But great harm was yt, as it thought me,
> That on his skinne a mormall had he."

Skinne is here mis-copied for *shin*. This mistake, and another more whimsical, we can trace into the *Rolle of Seynte Bartholœmeweis Priorie*, printed in Barret's History of Bristol, to whom it was communicated by Chatterton. Among a list of medical books, said to be preserved in the Infirmary, or *Ache-chamber* of the Priorie, we find *Gylbertines rolle of Ypocrates: the same fryarres booke of brenninge Johan Stowe of the cure of mormalles and the waterie leprosie: the rolle of the blacke mainger.* In a note on these two last articles, we are told, "Chaucer says, on his skin a mormalle had he and a blacke manger." Now, in the first place, Chatterton adhering to his erroneous transcript from Chaucer, of *skinne* for *shinne*, has made Johan Stowe lecture on the cure of mormalles, as if they were, like the leprosy, a cutaneous distemper, and not a cancer upon the bone. But, besides, he has so far mistaken his author, as to take *blanc-manger* a dish of exquisite cookery, which is pronounced by Chaucer to be the cook's masterpiece of skill, for *blacke manger*, some strange and nondescript disease, under which he laboured in addition to his *mormal;* and upon which there was a roll or essay in the *Ache-chamber* of St Bartholomew's priory. Chaucer's words are,

> "But gret harme was it, as it thoughte me,
> That on his *shinne* a mormal hadde he,
> For *blanc-manger* that made he with the best."

The principal ingredient of blanc-manger (if we recollect) was a cock brayed in a mortar. The resemblance of the letters *n* and *u* in the black-letter, probably led Chatterton to read *blauc* for *blanc;* and as he understood no French, his judgment could not correct his eye. We are thus able decidedly to trace the taste and the errors of Chatterton into the productions of Rowley. We do not, however, suppose that all the information contained in the works of Rowley was actually the invention of Chatterton. The keen eye and ardent research of the young poet, probably traced and interweaved with his narrative traditionary anecdotes preserved in his native city. Nothing that had an antique or uncouth appearance seems to have escaped his notice. Mr Tyrwhitt detected a curious instance of his minuteness of remark. In the Ballad of Charité, mention is made of a *horse-millanere,* a phrase at which the reader has usually paused with surprise. In the town of Bristol, and precisely in the street through which Chatterton passed to school, is hung forth a wooden horse decorated with ribbons, purposing to be the sign of a *horse-millanere.*

Nothing can afford a stronger picture of the force and weakness of the human mind, than the readiness with which Chatterton supplied himself and his particular friends with flourishing trees of genealogy, in which the sextons and pewterers of Bristol are deduced from a line of ancestry, which Howards and Hastings might envy, and decorated with all the splendid emblazonment of heraldry. We are mute with astonishment at the grave and

sober advice of the sexton's son of Radcliffe to his relation Mr Stevens of Salisbury: "When you quarter your arms, in the mullet, say Or, a fess, vert, by the name of Chatterton. I trace your family from Fitz-Stephen, son of Stephen, Earl of Aumerle in 1095, son of Od, Earl of Bloys, and Lord of Holdernesse." If the imagination of Chatterton was not actually so far vitiated, as in some degree to believe the reveries which he imposed upon others, we cannot help thinking that as Johnson says of Milton, his impudence must have been at least equal to his stupendous abilities. We were also diverted with the conclusion of the pedigree made out for Mr Burgum of Bristol, which begins with the Conqueror, and very prudently concludes about the reign of Charles II., when Mr Burgum might perhaps know something of his ancestors. Chatterton linked and gilded this splended chain of ancestry through all the ages remote enough to leave unbounded scope for fiction: when he approached the regions of probability, he let the end loose, that his friend might attach himself to it the best way he could. There is in Cumberland an ancient family, who have long possessed and taken their name from the manor of Brougham, to which Chatterton seems to allude, when he mentions the Castle of Bourgham in Northumberland. But the castle was, we believe, an appanage, not of the De Bourghams, lords of the manor, but of the Veteriponts and Cliffords.

We now dismiss the works of the unfortunate Chatterton, heartily wishing they may experience from the public kinder treatment than their unfor-

tunate and proud-spirited author. To the admirers of poetry they will ever be acceptable; nor can their history be heedfully perused, without imparting an awful lesson; for the fame of Chatterton is not merely a light to be wondered at—it shines as a beacon to point out the shoals upon which he was wrecked. The youthful reader, if conscious of powers which elevate him above his situation in life, may learn to avoid an overweening reliance upon his abilities, or an injudicious and unfair exertion of them. He may learn, that if neglect or contempt obstruct him in the fair pursuit of fame, it is better to prefer obscurity, than to attain, by the crooked path of literary forgery, the ambiguous reputation of an ingenious impostor. Above all, he may learn to guard against those sallies of an ill-regulated imagination, which buoyed up Chatterton with the most unreasonable expectations, only to plunge him into despair and suicide.[1] And if there be one who, conscious of inferior mental powers, murmurs at being allotted but "the single talent," and looks with envy on the flights of superior genius, let him read the life of Chatterton, and remember of him it may be truly said—

"Largus et exundans letho dedit ingenii fons."

[1] ["Chatterton, as appears by the Coroner's Inquest, swallowed arsenic in water, on the 24th of August, 1770, and died the next day. He was buried in a shell, in the burying-ground of Shoe-lane workhouse. Whatever unfinished pieces he might have, he cautiously destroyed before his death; and his room, when broken open, was found covered with little scraps of paper." —Life by Gregory, p. 71.]

ARTICLE IX.

RELIQUES OF BURNS.

From the Quarterly Review for 1809. *Reliques of Robert Burns. Collected by* R. H. Cromek. 1808.]

We opened a book bearing so interesting a title with no little anxiety. Literary reliques vary in species and value almost as much as those of the Catholic or of the antiquary. Some deserve a golden shrine for their intrinsic merit, some are valued from the pleasing recollections and associations with which they are combined, some, reflecting little honour upon their unfortunate author, are dragged by interested editors from merited obscurity. The character of Burns, on which we may perhaps hazard some remarks in the course of this article, was such as to increase our apprehensions. The extravagance of genius with which this wonderful man was gifted, being in his later and more evil days directed to no fixed or general purpose, was, in the morbid state of his health and feelings, apt to display itself in hasty sallies of virulent and

unmerited severity: sallies often regretted by the bard himself; and of which justice to the living and to the dead, alike demanded the suppression. Neither was this anxiety lessened, when we recollected the pious care with which the late excellent Dr Currie had performed the task of editing the works of Burns. His selection was limited, as much by respect to the fame of the living, as of the dead. He dragged from obscurity none of those satirical effusions, which ought to be as ephemeral as the transient offences which called them forth. He excluded every thing approaching to licence, whether in morals or in religion, and thus rendered his collection such, as doubtless Burns himself, in his moments of sober reflection, would have most highly approved. Yet applauding, as we do most highly applaud, the leading principles of Dr Currie's selection, we are aware that they sometimes led him into fastidious and over-delicate rejection of the bard's most spirited and happy effusions. A thin octavo published at Glasgow in 1801, under the title of *Poems ascribed to Robert Burns the Ayrshire bard*, furnishes valuable proofs of this assertion. It contains, among a good deal of rubbish, some of his most brilliant poetry. A cantata in particular, called *The Jolly Beggars*, for humorous description and nice discrimination of character, is inferior to no poem of the same length in the whole range of English poetry. The scene indeed is laid in the very lowest department of low life, the actors being a set of strolling vagrants, met to carouse, and barter their rags and plunder for liquor in a hedge ale-house. Yet even in describing the

movements of such a group, the native taste of the poet has never suffered his pen to slide into any thing coarse or disgusting. The extravagant glee and outrageous frolic of the beggars are ridiculously contrasted with their maimed limbs, rags, and crutches—the sordid and squalid circumstances of their appearance are judiciously thrown into the shade. Nor is the art of the poet less conspicuous in the individual figures, than in the general mass. The festive vagrants are distinguished from each other by personal appearance and character, as much as any fortuitous assembly in the higher orders of life. The group, it must be observed, is of Scottish character, and doubtless our northern brethren are more familiar with its varieties than we are; yet the distinctions are too well marked to escape even the South'ron. The most prominent persons are a maimed soldier and his female companion, a hackneyed follower of the camp, a stroller, late the consort of an Highland ketterer or sturdy beggar, —" but weary fa' the waefu' woodie!"—Being now at liberty, she becomes an object of rivalry between a " pigmy scraper with his fiddle " and a strolling tinker. The latter, a desperate bandit, like most of his profession, terrifies the musician out of the field, and is preferred by the damsel of course. A wandering ballad-singer, with a brace of doxies, is last introduced upon the stage. Each of these mendicants sings a song in character, and such a collection of humorous lyrics, connected by vivid poetical description, is not, perhaps, to be paralleled in the English language. As the collection and the poem are very little known in England, and as

it is certainly apposite to the Reliques of Robert Burns, we venture to transcribe the concluding ditty, chaunted by the ballad-singer at the request of the company, whose "mirth and fun have now grown fast and furious," and set them above all sublunary terrors of jails, stocks, and whipping posts. It is certainly far superior to any thing in the *Beggars' Opera*, where alone we could expect to find its parallel.

"Then ou're again, the jovial thrang
The poet did request,
To loose his pack an' wale a sang,
A ballad o' the best:

He rising, rejoicing
Between his twa Deborahs,
Looks round him, an' found them
Impatient for the chorus.

AIR.

See! the smoking bowl before us,
Mark our jovial ragged ring!
Round and round take up the chorus,
And in raptures let us sing.

Chorus.—A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

What is title? what is treasure?
What is reputation's care?
If we lead a life of pleasure,
'Tis no matter *how or where!*
A fig, &c.

With the ready trick and fable,
Round we wander all the day;

And at night, in barn or stable,
Hug our doxies on the hay.
A fig, &c.

Does the train-attended carriage
Through the country lighter rove?
Does the sober bed of marriage
Witness brighter scenes of love?
A fig, &c.

Life is all a variorum,
We regard not how it goes;
Let them cant about decorum
Who have characters to lose.
A fig, &c.

Here's to budgets, bags, and wallets!
Here's to all the wandering train!
Here's our ragged *brats and callets!*
One and all cry out, Amen!
A fig, &c."

We are at a loss to conceive any good reason why Dr Currie did not introduce this singular and humorous cantata into his collection. It is true, that in one or two passages the muse has trespassed slightly upon decorum, where, in the language of Scottish song,

"High kilted was she
As she gaed ower the lea."

Something, however, is to be allowed to the nature of the subject, and something to the education of the poet; and if, from veneration to the names of Swift and Dryden, we tolerate the grossness of the one, and the indelicacy of the other, the respect due to that of Burns may surely claim indulgence for a few light strokes of broad humour. The same collection contains *Holy Willie's Prayer*, a

piece of satire more exquisitely severe than any which Burns afterwards wrote, but unfortunately cast in a form too daringly profane to be received into Dr Currie's collection.

Knowing that these, and hoping that other compositions of similar spirit and tenor might yet be recovered, we were induced to think, that some of them, at least, had found a place in the collection now given to the public by Mr Cromek; but he has neither risked the censure, nor laid claim to the applause, which might have belonged to such an undertaking. The contents of the volume before us are more properly gleanings than relics—the refuse and sweepings of the shop, rather than the commodities which might be deemed contraband. Yet even these scraps and remnants contain articles of curiosity and value, tending to throw light on the character of one of the most singular men by whose appearance our age has been distinguished.

The first portion of the volume contains nearly two hundred pages of letters, addressed by Burns to various individuals, written in various tones of feeling and modes of mind—in some instances exhibiting all the force of the writer's talents, in others only valuable because they bear his signature. The avidity with which the reader ever devours this species of publication, has been traced to the desire of seeing the mind and opinions of celebrated men in their open and undisguised moments, and of perusing and appreciating their thoughts while the gold is yet rude ore, ere it is refined and manufactured into polished sentences or sounding stanzas. But, notwithstanding these fair pretences, we doubt if

this appetite can be referred to any more honourable source than the love of anecdote and private history. In fact, letters—at least those of a general and miscellaneous kind—very rarely contain the real opinions of the writer. If an author sits down to the task of formally composing a work for the use of the public, he has previously considered his subject, and made up his mind both on the opinions he is to express, and on the mode of supporting them. But the same man usually writes a letter only because the letter must be written—is probably never more at a loss than when looking for a subject—and treats it, when found, rather so as to gratify his correspondent, than communicate his own feelings. The letters of Burns, although containing passages of great eloquence, and expressive of the intense fire of his disposition, are not exceptions from this general rule. They bear occasionally strong marks of affectation, with a tinge of pedantry rather foreign from the bard's character and education. The following paragraphs illustrate both the excellencies and faults of his epistolary composition. Nothing can be more humorously imagined and embodied than the sage group of Wisdom and Prudence in the first, while the affectation of the second amounts to absolute rant.

"Do tell that to Lady M'Kenzie, that she may give me credit for a little wisdom. 'I Wisdom dwell with Prudence.' What a blessed fire-side!—How happy should I be to pass a winter evening under their venerable roof! and smoke a pipe of tobacco, or drink water-gruel with them! What solemn, lengthened, laughter-quashing gravity of phiz! What sage remarks on the good-for-nothing sons and daughters of indiscretion and folly!—and what frugal lessons, as we straitened the fire-side circle, on the uses of the poker and tongs!"

"Miss N. is very well, and begs to be remembered in the old way to you. I used all my eloquence, all the persuasive flourishes of the hand, and heart-melting modulation of periods in my power, to urge her out to Herveiston, but all in vain. My rhetoric seems quite to have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind. I have seen the day—but that is a 'tale of other years'—in my conscience I believe that my heart has been so oft on fire that it is absolutely vitrified. I look on the sex with something like the admiration with which I regard the starry sky in a frosty December night. I admire the beauty of the Creator's workmanship; I am charmed with the wild but graceful eccentricity of their motions, and—wish them good night. I mean this with respect to a certain passion *dont j'ai eu l'honneur d'être un miserable esclave:* as for friendship, you and Charlotte have given me pleasure, permanent pleasure, 'which the world cannot give, nor take away' I hope; and which will outlast the heavens and the earth."

In the same false taste, Burns utters such tirades as this:—

"Whether in the way of my trade, I can be of any service to the Rev. Doctor,[1] is I fear very doubtful. Ajax's shield consisted, I think, of seven bull hides and a plate of brass, which altogether set Hector's utmost force at defiance. Alas! I am not a Hector, and the worthy Doctor's foes are as securely armed as Ajax was. Ignorance, superstition, bigotry, stupidity, malevolence, self-conceit, envy—all strongly bound in a massy frame of brazen impudence. Good God, sir! to such a shield, humour is the peck of a sparrow, and satire the pop-gun of a school-boy. Creation-disgracing *scelerats* such as they, God only can mend, and the devil only can punish. In the comprehending way of Caligula, I wish they had all but one neck. I feel impotent as a child to the ardour of my wishes! O for a withering curse to blast the germins of their wicked machinations. O for a poisonous Tornado, winged from the Torrid Zone of Tartarus, to sweep the spreading crop of their villanous contrivances to the lowest hell!"

These passages, however, in which the author seems to have got the better of the man, in which

[1] Dr M'Gill, of Ayr. The poet gives the best illustration of this letter in one addressed to Mr Graham.—*Dr Currie's Ed.* No. 86.

the desire of shining, and blazing, and thundering, supersedes the natural expressions of feeling, and passion, are less frequent in the letters of Burns than perhaps of any other professed writer. Burns was, in truth, the child of passion and feeling. His character was not simply that of a peasant exalted into notice by uncommon literary attainments, but bore a stamp which must have distinguished him in the highest as in the lowest situation in life. To ascertain what was his natural temper and disposition, and how far it was altered or modified by the circumstances of birth, education, and fortune, might be a subject for a long essay; but to mark a few distinctions is all that can be here expected from us.

We have said that Robert Burns was the child of impulse and feeling. Of the steady principle which cleaves to that which is good, he was unfortunately divested by the violence of those passions which finally wrecked him. It is most affecting to add, that while swimming, struggling, and finally yielding to the torrent, he never lost sight of the beacon which ought to have guided him to land, yet never profited by its light.

We learn his opinion of his own temperament in the following emphatic burst of passion:—

"God have mercy on me! a poor d——d, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! The sport, the miserable victim, of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions!"

"Come, stubborn pride and unshrinking resolution, accompany me through this to me miserable world!" In such language did this powerful but

untamed mind express the irritation of prolonged expectation and disappointed hope, which slight reflection might have pointed out as the common fate of mortality. Burns neither acknowledged adversity as the "tamer of the human breast," nor knew the golden curb which discretion hangs upon passion. He even appears to have felt a gloomy pleasure in braving the encounter of evils which prudence might have avoided, and to have thought that there could be no pleasurable existence between the extremes of licentious frenzy and of torpid sensuality. "There are two only creatures that I would envy.—A horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia,—and an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment; the other has neither wish nor fear." When such a sentiment is breathed by such a being, the lesson is awful: and if pride and ambition were capable of being taught, they might hence learn that a well-regulated mind and controlled passions are to be prized above all the glow of imagination, and all the splendour of genius.

We discover the same stubborn resolution rather to endure with patience the consequences of error, than to own and avoid it in future, in the poet's singular choice of a pattern of fortitude.

"I have bought a pocket Milton, which I carry perpetually about with me, in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid, unyielding independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great personage, SATAN."

Nor was this a rash or precipitate choice, for in

a more apologetic mood he expresses the same opinion of the same personage.

"My favourite feature in Milton's Satan is his manly fortitude in supporting what cannot be remedied—in short, the wild, broken fragments of a noble, exalted mind in ruins. I meant no more by saying he was a favourite hero of mine."

With this lofty and unbending spirit were connected a love of independence and a hatred of control amounting almost to the sublime rant of Almanzor.

"He was as free as Nature first made man,
Ere the base laws of servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble savage ran."

In general society Burns often permitted his determination of vindicating his personal dignity to hurry him into unjustifiable resentment of slight or imagined neglect. He was ever anxious to maintain his post in society, and to extort that deference which was readily paid to him by all from whom it was worth claiming. This ill-judged jealousy of precedence led him often to place his own pretensions to notice in competition with those of the company who, he conceived, might found theirs on birth or fortune. On such occasions it was no easy task to deal with Burns. The power of his language, the vigour of his satire, the severity of illustration with which his fancy instantly supplied him, bore down all retort. Neither was it possible to exercise over the poet that restraint which arises from the chance of further personal consequences. The dignity, the spirit, the indignation of Burns was that of a plebeian, of a high-souled plebeian indeed, of a citizen of Rome or Athens, but still of a plebeian untinged with the

slightest shade of that spirit of chivalry which, since the feudal times, has pervaded the higher ranks of European society. This must not be imputed to cowardice, for Burns was no coward. But the lowness of his birth, and habits of society, prevented rules of punctilious delicacy from making any part of his education; nor did he, it would seem, see any thing so rational in the practice of duelling, as afterwards to adopt or to affect the sentiments of the higher ranks upon that subject. A letter to Mr Clarke, written after a quarrel upon political topics, has these remarkable, and we will add manly expressions.

"From the expressions Capt. ——————— made use of to me, had I had nobody's welfare to care for but my own, we should certainly have come, according to the manners of the world, to the necessity of murdering one another about the business. The words were such as, generally, I believe, end in a brace of pistols; but I am still pleased to think that I did not ruin the peace and welfare of a wife and a family of children in a drunken squabble."

In this point, therefore, the pride and high spirit of Burns differed from those of the world around him. But if he wanted that chivalrous sensibility of honour which places reason upon the sword's point, he had delicacy of another sort, which those who boast most of the former do not always possess in the same purity. Although so poor as to be ever on the very brink of absolute ruin, looking forwards now to the situation of a foot-soldier, now to that of a common beggar, as no unnatural consummation of his evil fortune, Burns was, in pecuniary transactions, as proud and independent as if possessed of a prince's revenue. Bred a peasant, and preferred to the

degrading situation of a common exciseman, neither the influence of the low-minded crowd around him, nor the gratification of selfish indulgence, nor that contempt of futurity, which has characterised so many of his poetical brethren, ever led him to incur or endure the burden of pecuniary obligation. A very intimate friend of the poet, from whom he used occasionally to borrow a small sum for a week or two, once ventured to hint that the punctuality with which the loan was always replaced at the appointed time was unnecessary and unkind. The consequence of this hint was the interruption of their friendship for some weeks, the bard disdaining the very thought of being indebted to a human being one farthing beyond what he could discharge with the most rigid punctuality. It was a less pleasing consequence of this high spirit that Burns was utterly inaccessible to all friendly advice. To lay before him his errors, or to point out their consequences, was to touch a string that jarred every feeling within him. On such occasions, his, like Churchill's, was

> "The mind which, starting, heaves the heartfelt groan,
> And hates the form she knows to be her own."

It is a dreadful truth, that when racked and tortured by the well-meant and warm expostulations of an intimate friend, he at length started up in a paroxysm of frenzy, and drawing a sword cane, which he usually wore, made an attempt to plunge it into the body of his adviser—the next instant he was with difficulty withheld from suicide.

Yet this ardent and irritable temperament had its periods, not merely of tranquillity, but of the

most subduing tenderness. In the society of men of taste, who could relish and understand his conversation, or whose rank in life was not so much raised above his own as to require, in his opinion, the assertion of his dignity, he was eloquent, impressive, and instructing. But it was in female circles that his powers of expression displayed their utmost fascination. In such, where the respect demanded by rank was readily paid as due to beauty or accomplishment; where he could resent no insult, and vindicate no claim of superiority, his conversation lost all its harshness, and often became so energetic and impressive, as to dissolve the whole circle into tears. The traits of sensibility which, told of another, would sound like instances of gross affectation, were so native to the soul of this extraordinary man, and burst from him so involuntarily, that they not only obtained full credence as the genuine feelings of his own heart, but melted into unthought of sympathy all who witnessed them. In such a mood they were often called forth by the slightest and most trifling occurrences; an ordinary engraving, the wild turn of a simple Scottish air, a line in an old ballad, were, like "the field mouse's nest" and "the uprooted daisy," sufficient to excite the sympathetic feelings of Burns. And it was wonderful to see those, who, left to themselves, would have passed over such trivial circumstances without a moment's reflection, sob over the picture, when its outline had been filled up by the magic art of his eloquence.

The political predilections, for they could hardly be termed principles, of Burns, were entirely deter-

mined by his feelings. At his first appearance, he felt, or affected, a propensity to jacobitism. Indeed a youth of his warm imagination and ardent patriotism, brought up in Scotland thirty years ago, could hardly escape this bias. The side of Charles Edward was the party, not surely of sound sense and sober reason, but of romantic gallantry and high achievement. The inadequacy of the means by which that prince attempted to regain the crown, forfeited by his fathers, the strange and almost poetical adventures which he underwent, the Scottish martial character honoured in his victories, and degraded and crushed in his defeat, the tales of the veterans who had followed his adventurous standard, were all calculated to impress upon the mind of a poet a warm interest in the cause of the house of Stuart. Yet the impression was not of a very serious cast; for Burns himself acknowledges in one of these letters that, "to tell the matter of fact, except when my passions were heated by some accidental cause, my jacobitism was merely by way of *vive la bagatelle*," p. 240. The same enthusiastic ardour of disposition swayed Burns in his choice of political tenets, when the country was agitated by revolutionary principles. That the poet should have chosen the side on which high talents were most likely to procure celebrity; that he to whom the factitious distinctions of society were always odious, should have listened with complacence to the voice of French philosophy, which denounced them as usurpations on the rights of man, was precisely the thing to be expected. Yet we cannot but think that if his superiors in the Excise department

had tried the experiment of soothing rather than of irritating his feelings, they might have spared themselves the disgrace of rendering desperate the possessor of such uncommon talents. For it is but too certain that from the moment his hopes of promotion were utterly blasted, his tendency to dissipation hurried him precipitately into those excesses which shortened his life. We doubt not that in that awful period of national discord he had done and said enough to deter, in ordinary cases, the servants of government from countenancing an avowed partisan of faction. But this partisan was Burns!—Surely the experiment of lenity might have been tried, and perhaps successfully. The conduct of Mr Graham of Fintray, our poet's only shield against actual dismission, and consequent ruin, reflects the highest credit upon that gentleman. We may dismiss these reflections on the character of Burns with his own beautiful lines.

> "I saw thy pulse's maddening play,
> Wild send thee pleasure's devious way,
> By passion driven:
> But yet the light that led astray,
> Was light from heaven."

The second part of this volume contains a number of memoranda by Burns, concerning the Scottish songs and music published by Johnson, in six volumes 8vo.—Many of these appear to us exceedingly trifling. They might indeed have adorned, with great propriety, a second edition of the work in question, or any other collection of Scottish songs; but, separated from the verses to which they relate, how can any one be interested

in learning that *Down the Burn Davie* was the composition of David Maigh, keeper of blood-hounds to the Laird of Riddell; that *Tarry woo* was, in the opinion of Burns, a "very pretty song;" or even that the author of *Polwarth on the Green* was "Captain John Drummond MacGrigor, of the family of Bochaldie?" Were it of consequence, we might correct the valuable information thus conveyed, in one or two instances, and enlarge it in many others. But it seems of more importance to mark the share which the poet himself took in compiling or embellishing this collection of traditional poetry, especially as it has not been distinctly explained either by Dr Currie or Mr Cromek. Tradition, generally speaking, is a sort of perverted alchymy which converts gold into lead. All that is abstractedly poetical, all that is above the comprehension of the merest peasant, is apt to escape in frequent recitation; and the *lacunæ*, thus created, are filled up either by lines from other ditties, or from the mother wit of the reciter or singer. The injury, in either case, is obvious and irreparable. But with all these disadvantages, the Scottish songs and tunes preserved for Burns that inexpressible charm which they have ever afforded to his countrymen. He entered into the idea of collecting their fragments with all the zeal of an enthusiast; and few, whether serious or humorous, pass through his hands without receiving some of those magic touches, which, without greatly altering the song, restored its original spirit, or gave it more than it had ever possessed. So dexterously are these touches combined with the ancient structure, that

the *rifaccimento*, in many instances, could scarcely have been detected, without the avowal of the bard himself. Neither would it be easy to mark his share in the individual ditties. Some he appears entirely to have re-written; to others he added supplementary stanzas; in some he retained only the leading lines and the chorus, and others he merely arranged and ornamented. For the benefit of future antiquaries, however, we may observe that many of the songs, claimed by the present editor as the exclusive composition of Burns, were, in reality, current long before he was born. Let us take one of the best examples of his skill in imitating the old ballad.—*M'Pherson's Lament* was a well-known song many years before the Ayrshire Bard wrote those additional verses which constitute its principal merit. This noted freebooter was executed at Inverness, about the beginning of the last century. When he came to the fatal tree, he played the tune to which he has bequeathed his name upon a favourite violin, and holding up the instrument, offered it to any one of his clan who would undertake to play the tune over his body at his lyke-wake: as none answered, he dashed it to pieces on the executioner's head, and flung himself from the ladder. The following are the wild stanzas, grounded, however, upon some traditional remains,[1] which Burns has put into the mouth of this desperado:—

[1] We have heard some of these recited, particularly one which begins—

"Now farewell, house, and farewell, friends,
And farewell, wife and bairns,
There's nae repentance in my heart,
The fiddle's in my arms"—

* * *

M'PHERSON'S FAREWELL.

Farewell, ye dungeons dark and strong,
The wretch's destiny!
M'Pherson's time will not be long,
On yonder gallows tree.
Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he;
He play'd a spring, and danc'd it round,
Below the gallows tree.

O what is death but parting breath?—
On mony a bloody plain
I've dar'd his face, and in this place
I scorn him yet again!
Sae rantingly, &c.

Untie these bands from off my hands,
And bring to me my sword;
And there's no a man in all Scotland,
But I'll brave him at a word.
Sae rantingly, &c.

I've liv'd a life of sturt and strife;
I die by treacherie:
It burns my heart I must depart
And not avenged be.
Sae rantingly, &c.

Now farewell light, thou sunshine bright,
And all beneath the sky!
May coward shame distain his name,
The wretch that dares not die!
Sae rantingly, &c.

How much Burns delighted in the task of eking out the ancient melodies of his country, appears from the following affecting passage in a letter written to Mr Johnson, shortly before his death.

"You are a good, worthy, honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world—because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting this publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow,

consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the Poet to far other and more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit, or the pathos of sentiment! However, *hope* is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can."

Notwithstanding the spirit of many of the lyrics of Burns, and the exquisite sweetness and simplicity of others, we cannot but deeply regret that so much of his time and talents was frittered away in compiling and composing for musical collections. There is sufficient evidence both in the edition of Dr Currie, and in this supplemental volume, that even the genius of Burns could not support him in the monotonous task of writing love verses on heaving bosoms and sparkling eyes, and twisting them into such rhythmical forms, as might suit the capricious evolutions of Scotch reels, ports, and strathspeys. Besides, this constant waste of his fancy and power of verse in small and insignificant compositions, must necessarily have had no little effect in deterring him from undertaking any grave or important task. Let no one suppose that we undervalue the songs of Burns. When his soul was intent on suiting a favourite air with words humorous or tender, as the subject demanded, no poet of our tongue ever displayed higher skill in marrying melody to immortal verse. But the writing of a series of songs for large musical collections, degenerated into a slavish labour, which no talents could support, led to negligence, and above all, diverted the poet from his grand plan of dramatic composition.

To produce a work of this kind, neither perhaps

a regular tragedy nor comedy, but something partaking of the nature of both, seems to have been long the cherished wish of Burns. He had even fixed on the subject, which was an adventure in low life, said to have happened to Robert Bruce, while wandering in danger and disguise after being defeated by the English. The Scottish dialect would have rendered such a piece totally unfit for the stage: but those who recollect the masculine and lofty tone of martial spirit which glows in the poem of Bannockburn, will sigh to think what the character of the gallant Bruce might have proved under the hand of Burns! It would undoubtedly have wanted that tinge of chivalrous feeling which the manners of the age, no less than the disposition of the monarch, imperiously demanded; but this deficiency would have been more than supplied by a bard who could have drawn from his own perceptions the unbending energy of a hero, sustaining the desertion of friends, the persecution of enemies, and the utmost malice of disastrous fortune. The scene, too, being partly laid in humble life, admitted that display of broad humour and exquisite pathos, with which he could interchangeably and at pleasure adorn his cottage views. Nor was the assemblage of familiar sentiments incompatible in Burns with those of the most exalted dignity. In the inimitable tale of Tam o' Shanter, he has left us sufficient evidence of his ability to combine the ludicrous with the awful and even the horrible. No poet, with the exception of Shakspeare, ever possessed the power of exciting the most varied and discordant emotions with such rapid transitions.

His humorous description of the appearance of Death (in the poem on Dr Hornbook) borders on the terrific, and the witches' dance, in the Kirk of Alloway, is at once ludicrous and horrible. Deeply must we then regret those avocations which diverted a fancy so varied and so vigorous, joined with language and expressions suited to all its changes, from leaving a more substantial monument to his own fame and to the honour of his country.

The next division is a collection of fugitive sentences and common places, extracted partly from the memorandum book of the poet, and partly, we believe, from letters which could not be published in their entire state. Many of these appear to be drawn from a small volume, entitled "Letters to Clarinda, by Robert Burns," which was printed at Glasgow, but afterwards suppressed. To these, the observations which we offered on the bard's letters in general, apply with additional force: for in such a selection, the splendid patches, the showy, declamatory, figurative effusions of sentimental affectation, are usually the choice of the editor. Respect for the mighty dead, prevents our quoting instances in which Burns has degraded his natural eloquence by these meretricious ornaments. Indeed his style is sometimes so forced and unnatural, that we must believe he knew to whom he was writing, and that an affectation of enthusiasm in platonic love and devotion, was more likely to be acceptable to the fair Clarinda, than the true language of feeling. The following loose and laboured passage shows that the passion of *Sylvander* (a name

sufficient of itself to damn a whole file of love-letters) had more of vanity than of real sentiment:—

"What trifling silliness is the childish fondness of the every-day children of the world! 'Tis the unmeaning toying of the younglings of the fields and forests: but where sentiment and fancy unite their sweets; where taste and delicacy refine; where wit adds the flavour, and good sense gives strength and spirit to all, what a delicious draught is the hour of tender endearment!—beauty and grace in the arms of truth and honour, in all the luxury of mutual love!"

The last part of the work comprehends a few original poems—epistles, prologues, and songs,—by which, if the author's reputation had not been previously established, we will venture to say it would never have risen above the common standard. At the same time there are few of them that do not, upon minute examination, exhibit marks of Burns's hand, though not of his best manner. The following exquisitely affecting stanza contains the essence of a thousand love tales:—

"Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

There are one or two political songs, which, for any wit or humour they contain, might have been very well omitted. The satirical effusions of Burns, when they related to persons or subjects removed from his own sphere of observation, were too vague and too coarse to be poignant. There are a few attempts at *English* verse, in which, as usual, Burns falls beneath himself. This is the more remarkable, as the sublimer passages of his "Saturday Night," "Vision," and other poems of celebrity,

always swell into the language of classic English poetry. But although in these flights he naturally and almost unavoidably assumed the dialect of Milton and Shakspeare, he never seems to have been completely at his ease when he had not the power of descending at pleasure into that which was familiar to his ear, and to his habits. In the one case, his use of the English was voluntary, and for a short time; but when assumed as a primary and indispensable rule of composition, the comparative penury of rhymes, and the want of a thousand emphatic words which his habitual acquaintance with the Scottish supplied, rendered his expression confined and embarrassed. No man ever had more command of this ancient Doric dialect than Burns. He has left a curious testimony of his skill, in a letter to Mr Nicol, published in this volume; an attempt to read a sentence of which, would break the teeth of most modern Scotchmen.

Three or four letters from William Burns, a brother of the poet, are introduced for no purpose that we can guess, unless to show that he wrote and thought like an ordinary journeyman saddler. We would readily have believed, without positive proof, that the splendid powers of the poet were not imparted to the rest of his family.

We scarcely know, upon the whole, in what terms we ought to dismiss Mr Cromek. If the reputation of Burns alone be considered, this volume cannot add to his fame; and it is too well fixed to admit of degradation. The Cantata already mentioned, is indeed the only one of his productions not published by Dr Currie, which we consider as

not merely justifying, but increasing his renown. It is enough to say of the very best of those now published, that they take nothing from it. What the public may gain by being furnished with additional means of estimating the character of this wonderful and self-taught genius, we have already endeavoured to state. We know not whether the family of the poet will derive any advantage from this publication of his remains. If so, it is the best apology for their being given to the world; if not, we have no doubt that the editor, as he is an admirer of Chaucer, has read of a certain pardoner, who

> ——"with his *relics* when that he fond
> A poor persone dwelling up on lond,
> Upon a day he gat him more moneie
> Than that the persone got in monethes tweie."

ARTICLE X.

CAMPBELL'S GERTRUDE OF WYOMING, &c.

[*Quarterly Review, May*, 1809.]

We open this volume with no ordinary impression of the delicacy and importance of the task which it imposes on us, and the difficulty of discharging it, at once with justice to the author, and to that public at whose bar we, as well as Mr Campbell, must be considered to stand. It is not our least embarrassment, that, in some respects, Mr Campbell may be considered as his own rival; and, in aspiring to extensive popularity, has certainly no impediment to encounter more formidable than the extent of his own reputation. To decide on the merit of *Gertrude of Wyoming* as the work of a poet hitherto undistinguished, would be comparatively easy. But we are unavoidably forced upon comparing it with Mr Campbell's former pieces; and, while our judgment is embroiled by the predilections, prejudices, and preferences, which the recollection of them has imprinted upon our imagination—there are other peculiar circumstances which enhance expectation, and increase proportion-

ally the difficulty of affording it complete gratification.

The Pleasures of Hope, a poem dear to every reader of poetry, bore, amidst many beauties, the marks of a juvenile composition, and received from the public the indulgence due to a promise of future excellence. Some license was also allowed for the didactic nature of the subject; which, prescribing no fixed plan, left the poet free to indulge his fancy in excursions as irregular as they are elegant and animated. It is a consequence of both these circumstances that the poem presents in some degree the appearance of an unfinished picture. In gazing with pleasure on its insulated groups and figures, the reflection will often intrude, that an artist, matured in taste and experience, would have methodized his subject, filled up the intermediate spaces, and brought to perfection a sketch of so much promise. The public readily made every allowance that could be claimed on the score of youth—a seeming generosity often conferred on the first essays of poets, painters, and orators, but for which a claim of repayment, with usurious interest, is regularly preferred against them upon their next appearance. But the hope of improvement was, in Mr Campbell's case, hardly necessary to augment the expectation raised by the actual excellence of his first poem. The beauties of a highly polished versification—that animated and vigorous tone of moral feeling—that turn of expression, which united the sweetness of Goldsmith with the strength of Johnson—a structure of language alike remote from servile imitation of our more classical poets, and

from the babbling and jingling simplicity of ruder minstrels—new, but not singular—elegant, but not trite—justified the admirers of *The Pleasures of Hope* in elevating its author to a pre-eminent situation among living poets. Neither did Mr Campbell suffer the admiration excited by his first essay to subside or be forgotten. From time to time we were favoured with exquisite lyrical effusions, calculated rather to stimulate than to gratify the public appetite. The splendid poems of *Hohenlinden* and *Lochiel,* manifesting high powers of imagination, and other short performances, replete either with animation or tenderness, seemed to declare their author destined to attain the very summit of the modern Parnassus. By some, this pre-eminence was already adjudged to him; while others only adjourned their suffrage, until a more daring, extended, and sustained flight, should make good the promises of his juvenile work, and of his shorter detached poems.

It has for a considerable time been known, that a new poem, of some length, was in Mr Campbell's contemplation; and when it was whispered, that he who sung the doubtful conflict of Hohenlinden, and the carnage of Culloden, had chosen for his theme the devastation of Wyoming, expectation was raised to its height. Desire was not too suddenly quenched; and it is only after a long period of suspense that the work has been given to the public. But it is no easy matter to satisfy the vague and indefinite expectation which suspense of this nature seldom fails to excite. Each reader is apt to form an idea of the subject, the narrative,

and the style of execution; so that the real poem is tried and censured not upon its own merits, but for differing from the preconceived dream of the critic's imagination. There are few who have not felt disappointment of a similar nature on visiting, for the first time, any spot highly celebrated for its scenery. Expectation has not only exaggerated its beauties, but often sketched a landscape of its own, which the mind unwillingly exchanges even for the most splendid reality. Perhaps, therefore, it is a natural consequence of overstrained hope, that the immediate reception of *Gertrude of Wyoming* should be less eminently favourable than the intrinsic merit of the poem, and the acknowledged genius of the author, appear to ensure; and perhaps, too, we may be able, in the course of our investigation, to point out other reasons which may for a season impede the popularity of a poem containing passages, both of tenderness and sublimity, which may decline comparison with few in the English language.

The tale of *Gertrude of Wyoming* is abundantly simple. It refers to the desolation of a beautiful tract of country, situated on both sides of the Susquehannah, and inhabited by colonists, whose primæval simplicity and hospitality recalled the idea of the golden age. In 1778, Wyoming, this favoured and happy spot, was completely laid waste by an incursion of Indians and civilized savages, under a leader named Brandt. The pretext was, the adherence of the inhabitants to the provincial confederacy; but the lust of rapine and cruelty which

distinguished the invaders was such as to add double horrors even to civil conflict.

We do not condemn this choice of a subject in itself eminently fitted for poetry; yet feeling as Englishmen we cannot suppress a hope that Mr Campbell will in his subsequent poems choose a theme more honourable to our national character, than one in which Britain was disgraced by the atrocities of her pretended adherents. We do not love to have our feelings unnecessarily put in arms against the cause of our country. The historian must do his duty when such painful subjects occur; but the poet who may choose his theme through the whole unbounded range of truth and fiction may well excuse himself from selecting a subject dishonourable to his own land.

Although the calamity was general, and overwhelmed the whole settlement of Wyoming, Mr Campbell has judiciously selected a single group as the subject of his picture; yet we have room to regret that in some passages at least he has not extended his canvass to exhibit, in the background, that general scene of tumult and horror which might have added force to the striking picture which he has drawn of individual misery.

The opening of the poem describes Wyoming in a state of more than Arcadian ease and happiness, where exiles or emigrants from all quarters of Europe met in peace, and contended only which should best adorn and improve their seat of refuge. The following stanzas comprehend this interesting description, and are at the same time a just specimen of the style and structure of the poem.

"On Susquehanna's side, fair Wyoming,
Although the wild-flower on thy ruined wall
And roofless homes a sad remembrance bring
Of what thy gentle people did befall,
Yet thou wert once the loveliest land of all
That see the Atlantic wave their morn restore.
Sweet land! may I thy lost delights recall,
And paint thy Gertrude in her bow'rs of yore,
Whose beauty was the love of Pensylvania's shore!

"It was beneath thy skies that, but to prune
His Autumn fruits, or skim the light canoe,
Perchance, along thy river calm at noon,
The happy shepherd swain had nought to do
From morn till evening's sweeter pastime grew;
Their timbrel, in the dance of forests brown
When lovely maidens prankt in flowret new,
And aye, those sunny mountains half way down
Would echo flagelet from some romantic town.

"Then, where of Indian hills the daylight takes
His leave, how might you the flamingo see
Disporting like a meteor on the lakes—
And playful squirrel on his nut-grown tree:
And every sound of life was full of glee,
From merry mock-bird's song, or hum of men,
While heark'ning, fearing nought their revelry,
The wild deer arch'd his neck from glades, and then
Unhunted, sought his woods and wilderness again.

"And scarce had Wyoming of war or crime
Heard but in transatlantic story rung,
For here the exile met from ev'ry clime,
And spoke in friendship ev'ry distant tongue;
Men from the blood of warring Europe sprung,
Were but divided by the running brook;
And happy where no Rhenish trumpet sung,
On plains no sieging mine's volcano shook,
The blue-ey'd German chang'd his sword to pruning-hook.

"Nor far some Andalusian saraband
Would sound to many a native rondelay.
But who is he that yet a dearer land
Remembers, over hills and far away?
Green Albyn! what though he no more survey

Thy ships at anchor on the quiet shore,
Thy pellochs rolling from the mountain bay;
Thy lone sepulchral cairn upon the moor,
And distant isles that hear the loud Corbrechtan roar!

"Alas! poor Caledonia's mountaineer,
That want's stern edict e'er, and feudal grief,
Had forced him from a home he loved so dear!
Yet found he here a home, and glad relief,
And plied the beverage from his own fair sheaf,
That fired his Highland blood with mickle glee;
And England sent her men, of men the chief,
Who taught those sires of Empire yet to be,
To plant the tree of life; to plant fair freedom's tree!

"Here was not mingled in the city's pomp
Of life's extremes, the grandeur and the gloom;
Judgment awoke not here her dismal tromp,
Nor seal'd in blood a fellow-creature's doom,
Nor mourn'd the captive in a living tomb.
One venerable man, beloved of all,
Sufficed where innocence was yet in bloom,
To sway the strife, that seldom might befall,
And Albert was their judge in patriarchal hall."

This Albert, the judge and patriarch of the infant settlement, is an Englishman; Gertrude, the heroine of the poem, is his only child. The chaste and affecting simplicity of the following picture would furnish a beautiful subject for the pencil.

"I may not paint those thousand infant charms;
(Unconscious fascination, undesigned!)
The orison repeated in his arms,
For God to bless her sire and all mankind;
The book, the bosom on his knee reclined,
Or how sweet fairy-lore he heard her con,
(The playmate ere the teacher of her mind);
All uncompanion'd else her years had gone
Till now in Gertrude's eyes their ninth blue summer shone."

An Indian, of a tribe friendly to the settlers,

approaches their cottage one morning, leading in his hand an English boy

> "Of Christian vesture and complexion bright,
> Led by his dusky guide like morning brought by night."

The swarthy warrior tells Albert of a frontier fort, occupied by the British, which had been stormed and destroyed by a party of Hurons, the allies of France. The Oneyda chief, who narrates the story, hastened to aid, but only arrived in time to avenge its defenders. All had been massacred, excepting the widow of the commander of the garrison and her son, a boy of ten or twelve years old. The former, exhausted with fatigue and grief, dies in the arms of the friendly Indians, and bequeaths to their chief the task of conducting her son to Albert's care, with a token to express that he was the son of Julia Waldegrave. Albert instantly recognises the boy as the offspring of two old and dear friends. A flood of kindly recollections, and the bitter contrast between the promise of their early days and the dismal fate which finally awaited the parents of Waldegrave, rush at once on the mind of the old man, and extort a pathetic lamentation. The deportment of the Indian warrior forms an admirable contrast to Albert's indulgence of grief, and the stanzas in which it is described rank among the finest in the poem.

> "He said—and strain'd unto his heart the boy:
> Far differently the mute Oneyda took
> His calumet of peace, and cup of joy;
> As monumental bronze unchanged his look:
> A soul that pity touch'd, but never shook:

Train'd, from his tree-rock'd cradle to his bier,
The fierce extremes of good and ill to brook
Impassive—fearing but the shame of fear—
A stoic of the woods—a man without a tear.—

" Yet deem not goodness on the savage stock
Of Outalissi's heart disdain'd to grow;
As lives the oak unwither'd on the rock
By storms above, and barrenness below:
He scorn'd his own, who felt another's wo;
And ere the wolf-skin on his back he flung,
Or laced his mocasins in act to go,
A song of parting to the boy he sung,
Who slept on Albert's couch, nor heard his friendly tongue."

After a lyrical effusion addressed to the slumbering boy, his "own adopted one," the savage returns to his deserts. His capacity of tracking his way through the wilderness by a species of instinct, or rather by the habit of observing the most minute signs derived from the face of earth or heaven, is described in nervous and striking poetry, and closes the first part of the poem.

Part II. opens with a description of Albert's abode, situated between two woods near a river, which, after dashing over a thundering cascade, chose that spot to expand itself into a quiet and pellucid sheet of living water. Beautiful in itself, the scene was graced by the presence of Gertrude, yet more beautiful, an "enthusiast of the woods," alive to all the charms of the romantic scenery by which she was surrounded, and whose sentimental benevolence extended itself even to England, which she knew only by her father's report. And here commences the great defect of the story. We totally lose sight of the orphan Waldegrave, whose arrival makes the only incident in the first canto,

and of whose departure from Wyoming we have not been apprized. Neither are we in the least prepared to anticipate such an event, excepting by a line in which Julia expresses a hope that her orphan would be conveyed to "England's shore"—an innuendo which really escaped us in the first, and even in the second, perusal of the poem, and which at any rate, by no means implies that her wish was actually fulfilled. The unaccountable disappearance of this character, to whom we had naturally assigned an important part in the narrative, is not less extraordinary than that Gertrude, in extending her kind wishes and affectionate thoughts towards friends in Britain whom she never knew, and only loved because they might possibly possess

"Her mother's looks—perhaps her likeness strong,"

omits all mention or recollection of the interesting little orphan of whom every reader has destined her the bride from the first moment of his introduction. Of him, however, nothing is said, and we are left to conjecture whether he has gone to Britain and been forgotten by his youthful playfellow, or whether he remains an unnoticed and undistinguished inmate of her father's mansion. We have next a splendid, though somewhat confused, description of a "deep untrodden grot," where, as it is beautifully expressed,—

——————— "rocks sublime
To human art a sportive semblance wore;
And yellow lichens coloured all the clime,
Like moonlight battlements and towers decay'd by time."

To this grotto, embosomed in all the splendid uxuriance of Transatlantic vegetation, Gertrude

was wont to retire "with Shakspeare's self to speak and smile alone," and here she is surprised by the arrival of a youth in a Spanish garb, leading in his hand his steed, who is abruptly announced as

"The stranger guest of many a distant land."

We were at least as much startled as Gertrude by this unexpected intruder, and are compelled to acknowledge that the suspense in which we were kept for a few stanzas is rather puzzling than pleasing. We became sensible that we had somehow lost the thread of the story, and while hurriedly endeavouring to recover it, became necessarily insensible to the beauties of the poetry. The stranger enquires for the mansion of Albert,—is of course hospitably received, and tells of the wonders which he had seen in Switzerland, in France, in Italy, and in California, whence he last arrived. At length Albert enquires after the orphan Waldegrave, who (as his question for the first time apprizes the reader) had been sent to his relations in England at the age of twelve, after three years' residence in the earthly paradise of Wyoming. The quick eye of Gertrude discovers the mysterious stranger to be "Waldegrave's self of Waldegrave come to tell," and all is rapturous recognition. And here, amidst many beauties, we are again pressed by the leading error of the narrative, for this same Waldegrave—who, for no purpose that we can learn, has been wandering over half the world—of whom the reader knows so little, who appears to have been entirely forgotten during the space of one third of the poem, and whom even Gertrude did not think wor-

thy of commemoration in orisons which called for blessings on friends she had never known—this same Waldegrave, of whose infantine affection for Gertrude we no where receive the slightest hint, with even more than the composure of a fine gentleman returned from the grand tour, coolly assures her and Albert at their first interview, that she "shall be his own with all her truth and charms." This extraordinary and unceremonious appropriation is submitted to by Gertrude and her father with the most unresisting and astonishing complacency. It is in vain to bid us suppose that a tender and interesting attachment had united this youthful couple during Waldegrave's residence at Wyoming. This is like the reference of Bayes to a conversation held by his personages behind the scenes; it is requiring the reader to guess what the author has not told him, and consequently what he is not obliged to know. This inherent defect in the narrative might have been supplied at the expense of two or three stanzas descriptive of the growing attachment between the children, and apprizing us of Waldegrave's departure for England. The omission is the more provoking, as we are satisfied of Mr Campbell's powers to trace the progress of their infant love, and the train of little incidents and employments which gave it opportunity to grow with their growth, and strengthen with their strength; in short, to rival the exquisite picture of juvenile affection presented in Thalaba.

But to proceed with our tale. Gertrude and Waldegrave are united, and spend three short months in all the luxury of mutual and innocent

love described in the concluding stanza of part second.

"Then would that home admit them—happier far
Than grandeur's most magnificent saloon—
While, here and there, a solitary star
Flush'd in the dark'ning firmament of June;
And silence brought the soul-felt hour, full soon,
Ineffable, which I may not pourtray;
For never did the Hymenean moon
A paradise of hearts more sacred sway,
In all that slept beneath her soft voluptuous ray."

The third part continues this delightful picture so true in itself, where pure affection and regulated desires combine to form connubial bliss; and we feel all that the poet would impress upon us when in the fifth stanza he announces the storm, which, in the wreck of nations, was to involve this little structure of home-built happiness; and describes the transitory nature of human felicity in the most beautiful and original simile which we have yet found applied to a theme so often sung.

"And in the visions of romantic youth,
What years of endless bliss are yet to flow!
But mortal pleasure, what art thou in truth!
The torrent's smoothness ere it dash below!
And must I change my song? and must I show,
Sweet Wyoming! the day, when thou wert doom'd,
Guiltless, to mourn thy loveliest bowers laid low!
When where of yesterday a garden bloom'd,
Death overspread his pall, and black'ning ashes gloom'd."

The approach of civil war in America, and the attachment of Waldegrave to the provincial cause, are briefly touched upon, as are the boding apprehensions of Gertrude, too soon to be fatally realized. One evening, while danger was yet deemed remote, an Indian, worn with fatigue and age, rushes hastily

into Albert's cottage, and is with difficulty recognised to be the Oneyda chief Outalissa, who had guided Waldegrave to Wyoming. After an indulgence of former recollections, rather too long to be altogether consistent with the pressing nature of his errand, the Indian informs the domestic circle that the savages, led by Brandt, had extirpated his whole tribe on account of their friendship to the Americans, and were approaching to wreak their vengeance by laying waste the settlement of Wyoming.

> " Scarce had he uttered—when Heaven's verge extreme
> Reverberates the bomb's descending star,—
> And sounds that mingled laugh,—and shout,—and scream,
> To freeze the blood, in one discordant jar,
> Rung to the pealing thunderbolts of war.
> Whoop after whoop with rack the ear assail'd;
> As if unearthly fiends had burst their bar;
> While rapidly the marksman's shot prevail'd;
> And aye, as if for death, some lonely trumpet wail'd.—
>
> " Then look'd they to the hills, where fire o'erhung
> The bandit groups, in one Vesuvian glare;
> Or swept, far seen, the tower, whose clock, unrung,
> Told legible that midnight of despair."

These sounds of tumult and desolation are mingled with the more cheering notes of the drums and military music of a body of provincialists, who arrive, it would seem, to protect the inhabitants of Wyoming. The description of this band, composed of the descendants of various climes, and arrayed by " torch and trumpet," evinces the same high tone of military poetry which glows through the stanzas on the battle of Hohenlinden. We are, however, again compelled to own some disappointment, arising from the indistinctness of the narra-

tive. The provincialists appear prepared to fight in defence of the Pennsylvanian Arcadia. Outalissi chants his battle-song, and Albert invokes, amid the blaze of neighbouring villages, the protection of the God of Hosts on the defenders of their native country; Waldegrave, too, assumes the sword and plume; yet, without any reason assigned, these preparations for battle terminate in a retreat to a neighbouring fort, and we are left to conjecture the motive for flight in a band so energetic, and so amply provided. The destruction, too, of Wyoming might have claimed a more lengthened detail than is afforded by the lines which we have quoted, and the main interest in the fate of Albert and his family would have been increased rather than diminished, by a glance at those numerous groups who must necessarily have accompanied the flight, or remained to perish with their dwellings. But of these we learn no more than if Waldegrave and Julia had, like our first parents, been the sole inhabitants of this terrestrial paradise. Covered by the friendly battalion, they reach in safety the fort which was to afford them shelter; and in the few accurate yet beautiful lines which characterise its situation and appearance, the poet has happily compelled into his service even the terms of modern fortification, and evinced a complete conquest over those technical expressions, which probably any other bard would have avoided, as fit only for the disciples of Cohorn or Vauban.

> "Past was the flight, and welcome seem'd the tower,
> That, like a giant standard-bearer, frown'd
> Defiance on the roving Indian power.
> Beneath, each bold and promontory mound

With embrasure emboss'd, and armour crown'd,
And arrowy frize, and wedged ravelin,
Wove like a diadem its tracery round
The lofty summit of that mountain green;
Here stood secure the group, and eyed a distant scene."

Here, while surveying in fancied security the progress of the devastation, Albert and Gertrude fall, pierced by the bullets of the lurking marksmen of the enemy. A death-speech, affecting, yet somewhat too long, exhausts the last efforts of the expiring Gertrude; and, as her husband kneels by the bodies in ineffable despair, the following exquisite description of Outalissi's sympathy gives an originality and wildness to the scene of wo at once appropriate to America, and distinct from the manners of every other country:—

" Then mournfully the parting bugle bid
Its farewell o'er the grave of worth and truth:
Prone to the dust afflicted Waldegrave hid
His face on earth;—him watch'd in gloomy ruth,
His woodland guide; but words had none to sooth
The grief that knew not consolation's name;
Casting his Indian mantle o'er the youth,
He watch'd, beneath its folds, each burst that came
Convulsive, ague-like, across his shuddering frame!"

We have gazed with delight on the savage witnessing the death of Wolfe, with awe and sorrow acting upon habits of stubborn apathy; and we have perused the striking passage in Spenser, whose Talus,

" An iron man ymade in iron mould,"

is described as having nevertheless an inly feeling of sympathy with the anguish of Britomarte; yet neither the painter nor the poet has, in our apprehension, presented so perfect and powerful an image

of sympathetic sorrow, in a heart unwont to receive such a guest, as appears in the mute distress of the Oneyda warrior, bending over his despairing foster-son. His grief at length becomes vocal in a death-song; which, did our limits permit, we would willingly transfer to these pages. But we have been so profuse in quotation, that the concluding stanzas are all we can produce, to justify our asserting for the author the pre-eminent merit of his lyrical poetry.

"To-morrow let us do or die!"[1]
But when the bolt of death is hurl'd,
Ah! whither then with thee to fly,
Shall Outalissi roam the world?
Seek we thy once-lov'd home?—
The hand is gone that cropt its flowers!
Unheard their clock repeats its hours!
Cold is the hearth within their bow'rs!—
And should we thither roam,
Its echoes, and its empty tread,
Would sound like voices from the dead!

"Or shall we cross yon mountains blue,
Whose streams my kindred nation quaff'd;
And by my side, in battle true,
A thousand warriors drew the shaft?
Ah! there in desolation cold,
The desert serpent dwells alone,
Where grass o'ergrows each mould'ring bone,
And stones themselves to ruin grown,
Like me, are death-like old.
Then seek we not their camp—for there—
The silence dwells of my despair!

[1] This expression occurs in Burns's Bannockburn; yet it is a kind of common property, being the motto, we believe, of a Scottish family. We might more justly, on the part of the ingenious Dr Leyden, reclaim the line,

"Red is the cup they drink, but not with wine.

But these occasional coincidences, over which stupidity delights to doze, are hardly worth noticing in criticising original poetry.

> " But hark, the trump!—to-morrow thou
> In glory's fires shalt dry thy tears:
> Ev'n from the land of shadows now
> My father's awful ghost appears;
> Amidst the clouds that round us roll,
> He bids my soul for battle thirst—
> He bids me dry the last—the first—
> The only tears that ever burst—
> From Outalissi's soul;—
> Because I may not stain with grief
> The death-song of an Indian chief."

With these stanzas the curtain is dropped over the dead and the mourners, and the poem is concluded.

Before we proceed to any general examination of *Gertrude of Wyoming*, we think it necessary to intimate to our readers, that it is by no means owing to deficiency of wit, on our own part, that we have conducted them in sober sadness from the beginning to the end of Mr Campbell's affecting tale. We are perfectly aware, that, according to the modern canons of criticism, the reviewer is expected to show his immense superiority to the author reviewed, and, at the same time, to relieve the tediousness of narration, by turning the epic, dramatic, moral story before him into quaint and lively burlesque. We had accordingly prepared materials for caricaturing *Gertrude of Wyoming*, in which the irresistible Spanish pantaloons of her lover were not forgotten —Albert was regularly distinguished as old Jonathan—the provincial troops were called Yankie-doodles—and the sombre character of the Oneyda chief was relieved by various sly allusions to " blankets, strouds, stinkŭbus, and wampum;" and having thus clearly demonstrated to Mr Campbell

and to the reader, that the whole effect of his poem was as completely at our mercy as the house which a child has painfully built with a pack of cards, we proposed to pat him on the head with a few slight compliments on the ingenuity of his puny architecture, and dismiss him with a sugar-plum, as a very promising child indeed. But however prepared we came to *quiz* what is no otherwise ridiculous than because serious and pathetic, our hearts recoiled from the disingenuousness of the task. We shall ever be found ready to apply the lash of ridicule to conceit, presumption, or dulness; but no temptation to display our own wit, or to conciliate popularity, shall prompt us to expose genius to the malignant grin of envious folly, or, by low and vulgar parody, to derogate from a work which we might strive in vain to emulate.

We return from this digressive apology to the merits and defects of Gertrude of Wyoming, which have this marked singularity, that the latter intrude upon us at the very first reading, whereas, after repeated perusals, we perceive beauties which had previously escaped our notice. We have indeed rather paradoxically been induced to ascribe the most obvious faults to the same cause which has undoubtedly produced many of the excellences of the poem,—to the anxious and assiduous attention, which the author has evidently bestowed upon it before publication. It might be expected that the public would regard with indulgence those imperfections which arise from the poet's diffidence of his own splendid powers, and too great deference to the voice of criticism. In some respects, however,

public taste, like a fine lady, "stoops to the forward and the bold;" and the modest and anxious adventurer is defrauded of the palm, merely that his judges may enjoy the childish superiority of condemning an over-laboured attempt to give them pleasure. Let no reader suppose that we recommend to imitation the indiscreet, and undaunted precipitation with which another popular poet is said to throw his effusions before the public with the indifference of an ostrich as to their success or failure. To sober criticism the fault of him who will not do his best is greater than the excess of over caution, as the sin of presumption is greater than that of spiritual despondency. Carelessness is also a crime of deeper dye when considered with reference to its effects upon public taste; for the habit of writing loosely is particularly captivating to the fry of young scribblers, and we are in danger of being deluged with rhapsodical romances by poets who would shrink from the attempt of imitating the condensed, polished, and laboured stanzas of Gertrude of Wyoming. But considered with reference not to the ultimate reputation, but to the immediate popularity of the author, it is dangerous to allow the public to suppose that they have before them the work upon which, after the most solicitous and anxious exertion, he is willing to stake his poetical character. A spirit of contradiction, which animates the mass of mankind, impels them to depreciate that which is presented as the *chef d'œuvre* of the artist; and the question is no longer whether the work be excellent, but whether it has attained that summit of excellence

on which no poet ever was or ever will be placed by his contemporaries.

We have hitherto only considered the labour bestowed upon *Gertrude of Wyoming* as an impediment to the flow of popularity which has in the present day attended poems of a ruder structure. But the public taste, although guided in some degree by caprice, is also to a certain extent correctly grounded upon critical doctrine; and the truth is, that an author cannot work upon a beautiful poem beyond a certain point, without doing it real and irreparable injury in more respects than one.

It is, in the first place, impossible to make numerous and minute alterations, to alter the position of stanzas, to countermarch and invert the component parts of sentences, without leaving marks of their original array. The epitaph of the Italian Valetudinary will apply as well in poetry as in regimen; and it may be said of many a laboured effort of genius, "*Stava bene, ma per star meglio, sto qui.*" There are in *Gertrude* passages of a construction so studiously involved, that nothing but the deepest consideration could have enabled the author to knit the Gordian knot by which his meaning is fettered, and which unfortunately requires similar exertion of intellect ere it can be disentangled. An ordinary reader is sometimes unable and always unwilling to make such an effort, and hence the volume is resigned and condemned in a moment of splenetic impatience. Some of the introductory stanzas have their beauties thus obscured, and afford rather a

conjectural than a certain meaning. We allude to the second in particular. Similar indistinctness occurs in the construction of the following sentence:—

> "But high in amphitheatre above
> His arms the everlasting aloe threw:
> *Breathed but an air of heaven*, and all the grove
> Instinct as if with living spirit grew."

The idea here is beautiful, but it is only on reflection that we discover that the words in italics mean not that the aloe breathed an air of heaven, but that the grove grew instinct with living spirit so soon as the slightest air of heaven breathed on it. Sometimes passages, of which the tone is simple and natural, are defaced by affected inversion, as in Gertrude's exclamation:—

> "Yet say! for friendly hearts from whence we came
> Of us does oft remembrance intervene?"

Again, in altering and retouching, inverting and condensing his stanzas, an author will sometimes halt between his first and his latter meaning, and deviate into defects both of sense and grammar. Thus in the Oneyda's first song we have—

> "Sleep, wearied one! and in the dreaming land
> Shouldst thou the spirit of thy mother greet,
> O say *to-morrow* that the white man's hand
> *Hath plucked* the thorns of sorrow from thy feet."

Lastly, and above all, in the irksome task of repeated revision and reconsideration, the poet loses, if we may use the phrase, the impulse of inspiration; his fancy, at first so ardent, becomes palled and flattened, and no longer excites a correspondent glow of expression. In this state of mind he may

correct faults, but he will never add beauties; and so much do we prefer the stamp of originality to tame correctness, that were there not a medium which ought to be aimed at, we would rather take the *prima cura*, with all its errors and with all its beauties, than the over-amended edition in which both are obliterated. Let any one read the most sublime passage in Shakspeare an hundred times over without intermission, it will at length convey to the tired ear neither pathos nor sublimity, hardly even an intelligible idea. Something analogous to this occurs to every poet in the melancholy task of correction. The Scythians, who debated their national affairs first in the revel of a festival, and afterwards during a day of fasting, could hardly experience a greater sinking of spirit in their second consultation, than the bard, who, in revising the offspring of moments of enthusiastic feeling, experiences that

> "The dear illusion will not last,
> The era of enchantment's past."

Then occur the doubtful and damping questions, whether the faded inspiration was genuine—whether the verses corresponded in any degree to its dictates, or have power to communicate to others a portion of the impulse which produced them? Then comes the dread of malignant criticism; and last, but not least tormenting, the advice of literary friends, each suggesting doubts and alterations, till the spirit is corrected out of the poem, as a sprightly boy is sometimes lectured and flogged, for venial indiscretions, into a stupid and inanimate dunce. The beautiful poem of *Lochiel*, which Mr Camp-

bell has appended to the present volume as if to illustrate our argument, exhibits marks of this injudicious alteration. Let us only take the last lines, where, in the original edition, the champion declares, that even in the moment of general rout and destruction,

> "Though my perishing ranks should be strew'd in their gore,
> Like ocean-weeds heap'd on the surf-beaten shore,
> Lochiel, untainted by flight or by chains,
> While the kindling of life in his bosom remains,
> Shall victor exult, or in death be laid low,
> With his back to the field, and his feet to the foe!
> And, leaving in battle no blot on his name,
> Look proudly to heaven from the death-bed of fame."

The whole of this individual, vigorous, and marked picture of the Highland chieftain lying breathless amid his broken and slaughtered clan—a picture so strong, that we even mark the very posture and features of the hero—is humbled and tamed, abridged and corrected, into the following vague and inexpressive couplet:—

> "Lochiel - - - - - - - - -
> Shall victor exult in the battle's acclaim,
> Or look to yon heaven from the death-bed of fame."

If the pruning knife has been applied with similar severity to the beauties of *Gertrude of Wyoming*, the hatchet of the Mohawk Brandt himself was not more fatally relentless and indiscriminate in its operations.

The book contains, besides *Gertrude of Wyoming*, several smaller pieces. Two beautiful war odes, entitled *The Mariners of England* and *The Battle of the Baltic*, afford pleasing instances of that short and impetuous lyric sally in which Mr Campbell

excels all his contemporaries. Two ballads, *Glenara* and *Lord Ullin's Daughter*,—the former approaching the rude yet forcible simplicity of the ancient minstrels, the latter upon a more refined plan,—conclude the volume. They are models in their several styles of composition.

ARTICLE XI.

THE BATTLES OF TALAVERA. A POEM.

[*By the Right Hon.* J. W. Croker. *Quarterly Review*, *November*, 1809.]

THERE is no point in which our age differs more from those which preceded it, than in the apparent apathy of our poets and rhymers to the events which are passing over them. From the days of Marlborough to those of Wolfe and Hawke, the Tower and Park guns were not more certain proclaimers of a victory, than the pens of contemporary bards. St James's had then its odes, and Grub Street poured forth its ballads upon every fresh theme of national exultation. Some of these productions, being fortunately wedded to popular tunes,

have warped themselves so closely with our character, that, to love liberty and roast beef is not more natural to an Englishman, than to beat time to "Steady, boys, Steady," and "Rule Britannia." Our modern authors are of a different cast; some of them roam back to distant and dark ages; others wander to remote countries, instead of seeking a theme in the exploits of a Nelson, an Abercromby, or a Wellesley; others amuse themselves with luscious sonnets to Bessies and Jessies; and all seem so little to regard the crisis in which we are placed, that we cannot help thinking they would keep fiddling their allegros and adagios, even if London were on fire, or Buonaparte landed at Dover.

We are old-fashioned men, and are perhaps inclined to see, in the loss and decay of ancient customs, more than can reasonably be traced from them; to regard, in short, that as a mark of apathy and indifference to national safety and glory, which may only arise from a change in the manner of expressing popular feeling. Be that as it may, we think that the sullen silence observed by our present race of poets, upon all themes of immediate national concern, argues little confidence in their own powers, small trust in the liberal indulgence of the public to extemporaneous compositions, and, above all, a want of that warm interest in such themes as might well render them indifferent to both considerations. Lord Wellington, more fortunate than any contemporary English general, whether we regard the success or the scale of his achievements, has been also unusually distinguished

by poetical commemoration; and as his exploits form an exception to the train of evil fortune which has *generally* attended our foreign expeditions, the hearts of those capable of celebrating them seem to have been peculiarly awakened and warmed at the recital. Probably many of our readers have seen the superb Indian war-song which celebrated his conquest over the Mahrattas: beginning

> " Shout, Britain, for the battle of Assay,
> For that was a day
> When we stood in our array,
> Like the lion turn'd to bay,
> And the battle-word was conquer or die! "

We are now happy to find that another bard has advanced with a contribution to adorn the most recent and most glorious wreath won by the same gallant general. The promptitude as well as the patriotism of the tribute might claim indulgence as well as praise; but it is with pleasure we observe, that although this volunteer has rushed forward without waiting to arm himself in that panoply which is often, after all, found too slight to repel the assaults of modern criticism, neither his adventurous courage nor the goodness of his cause, is his sole or his principal merit.

The battle of Talavera is written in that irregular Pindaric measure first applied to serious composition by Mr Walter Scott, and it is doing no injustice to the ingenious author to say, that in many passages, we were, from the similarity of the stanza and of the subject, involuntarily reminded of the battle of Flodden, in the sixth book of Marmion. The feeling, however, went no farther than

the perception of that kindred resemblance between those of the same family which is usually most striking at first sight, and becomes less remarkable, and at length invisible, as we increase in intimacy with those in whom it exists. In one respect the choice of the measure is more judicious on the part of the nameless bard, than on that of Mr Scott. The latter had a long narrative to compose, and was necessarily forced upon passages in which the looseness and irregularity of his versification has an extravagant and slovenly appearance. It is where the tone of passion is low, that the reader demands a new interest from regularity of versification and beauty of selected diction. On the other hand, in passages of vivid, and especially of tumultuary and hurried description, the force of the poet's thought, and the intenseness of the feeling excited, ought to support his language. He may be then permitted to strip himself as to a combat, and to evince that "brave neglect" of the forms of versification which express an imagination too much exalted, and a mind too much occupied by the subject itself, to regard punctiliously the arrangement of rhymes or the measurement of stanzas. In this point of view, few themes present themselves which can better authorize a daring flight, than that which has been selected by the author of Talavera.

The poem opens with the following stanza, of which the first nine lines are an exquisite picture of repose, and the last somewhat more feebly and prosaically expressed.

> " 'Twas dark; from every mountain head
> The sunny smile of heaven had fled,

And evening, over hill and dale
Dropt, with the dew, her shadowy veil;
In fabled Tajo's darkening tide
Was quenched the golden ray;
Silent, the silent stream beside,
Three gallant people's hope and pride,
Three gallant armies lay.
Welcome to them the clouds of night,
That close a fierce and hurried fight—
And wearied all, and none elate,
With equal hope and doubt they wait
A fiercer, bloodier day.
France, every nation's foe, is there,
And Albion's sons her red cross bear,
With Spain's young liberty to share,
The fortune of the fray."

The attack of the French is then described with all the peculiar circumstances of uncertainty and horror that aggravate the terrors of midnight conflict. The doubtful and suppressed sounds which announce to the defenders the approach of the assailants; the rush of the former to meet and anticipate the charge; the reflection on those who fall without witnesses to their valour; and all the "wonders of that gloomy fight," are successfully and artfully introduced to impress the dreadful scene upon the mind of the reader: the following lines have peculiar and picturesque merit.

"Darkling they fight, and only know
If chance has sped the fatal blow,
Or, by the trodden corse below,
Or by the dying groan:
Furious they strike without a mark,
Save now and then the sulphurous spark
Illumes some visage grim and dark,
That with the flash is gone!"

In the succeeding stanzas, we have the repose

after the action, and the preparation for the general battle of the next day. The anxiety of the British general is described, and a singular coincidence pointed out in the sixth stanza. We shall transcribe it, and "let the stricken deer go weep."

> "Oh heart of honour, soul of fire,
> Even at that moment fierce and dire,
> Thy agony of fame!
> When Britain's fortune dubious hung,
> And France tremendous swept along,
> In tides of blood and flame.
> Even while thy genius and thy arm
> Retrieved the day and turned the storm,
> Even at that moment, factious spite,
> And envious fraud essayed to blight
> The honours of thy name."

The share which is assigned to Lord Wellington in the conduct of the fight, is precisely that which is really the lot of a commander-in-chief. Generals were painted in armour long after

> "—— the fashion of the fight
> Had laid gilt steel and twisted mail aside
> For modern foppery."

And from some similar concatenation of ideas—modern poets, for many a day after the "eagle-glance" and commanding genius of a hero had been the attributes which decided the field, continued to describe him mowing down whole ranks with his sword, as if personal strength were as essential to his success as in the days of the Trojan war. This foolish fashion, which, like every false and unnatural circumstance, tends obviously to destroy the probability of the scene, has been discarded by good taste ever since the publication of

Addison's Campaign. The approach of the Gallic army is beautifully described.

" And is it now a goodly sight,
Or dreadful to behold,
The pomp of that approaching fight,
Waving ensigns, pennons light,
And gleaming blades and bayonets bright,
And eagles winged with gold;
And warrior bands of many a hue,
Scarlet and white and green and blue,
Like rainbows o'er the morning dew,
Their various lines unfold:
While cymbal clang and trumpet strain,
The knell of battle toll'd;
And trampling squadrons beat the plain,
'Till the clouds echoed back again,
As if the thunder rolled."

Our bounds will not permit us to quote the opening of the battle, though it contains some passages of great merit. Realizing his narrative with an art, which has been thought almost irreconcilable with poetry, the author next undertakes to give us a distinct idea of those manœuvres and movements upon which the success of the day depended; and by clothing them with the striking circumstances which hide the otherwise technical and somewhat familiar detail of the Gazette, he has succeeded at once in preserving the form and leading circumstances, and "all the current of the heady fight;" and, generally speaking, in presenting them to the fancy in a manner as poetical as they are clear to the understanding. In treading, however, upon a line so very narrow, he has sometimes glided into bombast on the one hand, or into flat, bald, and vulgar expression upon the other. Although, for instance, the word "*firelocks*," be used technically, and some-

what pedantically, to express the men who bear them, we cannot permit a poet to speak with impunity of

> "Full fifty thousand *muskets bright*
> *Led* by old warriors trained to fight."

Spears, we know, is used for *spearmen;* but this is a license sanctioned by antiquity, and not to be extended to modern implements of war. In other places, the ardour of the poet is expressed in language too turgid and inflated. But the following stanza may safely be quoted as avoiding, under very difficult circumstances, the extremes of simplicity and bombast; and describing the celebrated charge of the British cavalry with a spirit worthy of those whose gallantry was so memorable on that memorable day.

> "Three columns of the flower of France,
> With rapid step and firm, advance,
> At first through tangled ground,
> O'er fence and dell and deep ravine—
> At length they reach the level green,
> The midnight battle's murderous scene,
> The valley's eastern bound.
> There in a rapid line they form,
> Thence are just rushing to the storm,
> By bold Belluno led.
> When sudden thunders shake the vale,
> Day seems, as in eclipse, to fail,
> The light of heaven is fled.
> A dusty whirlwind rides the sky,
> A living tempest rushes by
> With deafening clang and tread—
> 'A charge, a charge,' the British cry,
> 'And Seymour at its head.'"

The miscarriage of this gallant body of cavalry amid the broken ground in which the French again

formed their column, its causes and consequences, the main battle itself, and all its alternations of success, are described in the same glowing and vivid language; which we will venture to say is not that of one who writes with a view to his own distinction as a poet, but who feels that living fire glow within him which impels him to fling into verse his animated and enthusiastic feelings of exultation on contemplating such a subject as the battle of Talavera. The following description of a circumstance new to the terrors of battle, we shall insert, ere we take our leave of Talavera.

"But shooting high and rolling far,
What new and horrid face of war
Now flushes on the sight?
'Tis France as furious she retires,
That wreaks in desolating fires,
The vengeance of her flight.
The flames the grassy vale o'er-run,
Already parch'd by summer's sun;
And sweeping turbid down the breeze
In clouds the arid thickets seize,
And climb the dry and withered trees
In flashes long and bright.
Oh! 'twas a scene sublime and dire,
To see that billowy sea of fire,
Rolling its fierce and flakey flood,
O'er cultured field and tangled wood,
And drowning in the flaming tide,
Autumn's hope and summer's pride.
From Talavera's wall and tower
And from the mountain's height,
Where they had stood for many an hour,
To view the varying fight,
Burghers and peasants in amaze
Behold their groves and vineyards blaze!
Trembling they viewed the bloody fray,
But little thought, ere close of day,
That England's sigh and France's groan

Should be re-echoed by their own!
But ah! far other cries than these—
Are wafted on the dismal breeze—
Groans, not the wounded's lingering groan—
Shrieks, not the shriek of death alone—
But groan and shriek and horrid yell
Of terror, torture, and despair,
Such as 'twould freeze the tongue to tell,
And chill the heart to hear,
When to the very field of fight,
Dreadful alike in sound and sight,
The conflagration spread,
Involving in the fiery wave,
The brave and reliques of the brave—
The dying and the dead!"

We have shunned, in the present instance, the unpleasant task of pointing out, and dwelling upon individual inaccuracies. There are several hasty expressions, flat lines, and deficient rhymes, which prove to us little more than that the composition was a hurried one. These, in a poem of a different description, we should have thought it our duty to point out to the notice of the author. But, after all, it is the spirit of a poet that we consider as demanding our chief attention; and upon its ardour or rapidity must finally hinge our applause or condemnation. We care as little (comparatively that is to say) for the minor arts of composition and versification as Falstaff did for the thews and sinews, and outward composition of his recruits. It is "*the heart, the heart,*" that makes the poet as well as the soldier; and while we shall not withhold some applause even from the ordinary statuary who executes a common figure, our wreath must be reserved for the Prometheus who shall impregnate his statue with fire from heaven.

ARTICLE XII.

SOUTHEY'S CURSE OF KEHAMA.

[*From the Quarterly Review, February*, 1811. *The Curse of Kehama. By* Robert Southey. London: 1810.]

Ever since the revival of letters, the learned world has been agitated by dissensions between two of its most distinguished classes, the poets and the critics, and each has in its turn made a plausible appeal to the public. The poets have urged, and with much appearance of justice, that their peculiar talent being of a nature singularly capricious and evanescent, it is not in the power even of the possessors to prescribe its exertions. That for this reason it has almost in every language borne a name implying inspiration, as if poetry were less the work of the author in his ordinary and imperturbed state of mind, than the effusion of a moment of enthusiasm, when the ideas are sublimed, and the imagination kindled by an impulse which he can neither guide nor withstand. They have proceeded in pathetic strains to state the hardship of

a profession in which their exertions, if successful, are uniformly dogged by calumny, and, if otherwise, by contempt and disgrace. It is but fair, they allege, that in so disadvantageous a combat they should be allowed to choose their own ground, to make such experiments upon the public taste, and the principles of their own art, as change of times appears to demand; and that it is the height of injustice to confine their efforts to the subjects chosen by their predecessors which have now lost the gloss of novelty, and are become in a manner exhausted. They contend that themselves alone can be judges of the force and faculties of their own mind, and consequently of the most advantageous mode of employing their powers; and that urging them to a style of composition, which, however excellent in itself, is alien from their temper and studies, is as absurd as to compel David to use the armour which he had not proved, instead of his own pastoral stone and sling.—The object of poetry is pleasure; and if the old track has ceased to guide us towards it, fresh avenues must be opened. Nay, conceding that the style of their predecessors is more pure and excellent than their own, modern authors still plead that, like a popular melody "which the carmen whistle," it has in some degree lost its effect by repeated and dull imitation. Let us, say they, yield to the usual revolutions of taste, and indulge the public with some variety in poetical composition. Those who succeed us, more fortunate than ourselves, may again resort to the imitation of purer models, and their efforts will not only have the renewed grace

of novelty but all the advantages which can be gained by a contrast with our own.

The critics are not without their answers to these charges. They plead that poetry, like all the other fine arts, has its general rules, which, though strictly observed, will still leave endless scope for variety. That as the musician consents that his notes shall be arranged by the general laws of harmony, it does not become the poet to assume the license of framing his effusions according to the fantastic dictates of his own imagination. If, in a long succession of ages, the legitimate subjects of verse lose the charm of absolute novelty, the loss had better be supplied by an attempt to throw over them a polish and a grace to which the ancient models were strangers, than by capricious excursions into the realms of fancy. The form of a Grecian temple, they say, no longer boasts to our eyes the charm of novelty; yet that is no reason for supplying its place by the grotesque and puerile singularities of a Chinese pagoda. The plea of hardship they refute by an appeal to the experience of every other profession, where long study and early apprenticeship are as indispensable to success as genius and talent. To the personal objection against their judgment, they reply that the poet is seldom the best judge of his own compositions, or the most impartial arbiter of those of others; that in the glow of enthusiastic feeling he is apt to misuse his own talents and mislead the public taste; and that in all nations there has arisen, with the general diffusion of literature, a separate class of men neither professing to be poets themselves, nor

to read poetry upon the usual motives of interest and amusement, but for the sake of justice to the dead and candour to the living, to mark the progress of the art itself, to correct the exuberances of its professors, to point out their excellences, to whisper to them the advice which they can never collect from the thunder of applause.

Amid these contending pretensions, it appears to us that the critic rests too much upon usage and authority, and that the poet allows too little to the general principles of taste. The former would tie down an author to the rules of Scaliger and Bossu, the latter claims an indemnity from all critical regulation whatever. It requires little acquaintance with poetry to know how few good epics have appeared; and we fear that of those which retain the greatest share of popularity, very few will be found to be written by poets who have left the beaten track, and endeavoured to produce something new and original. The ingenuity of critics has been strained to discover common rules, which should at once apply to the *Iliad* and *Paradise Lost;* but whoever will fairly take a view of the subject, must be satisfied that although the talents of the two authors did in many material points resemble each other, yet the nature of their themes, the object of their poetry, the rules upon which it is conducted, differ as widely as possible; and if they had not both been called epic poets, scarcely another point of resemblance would be found between them. Virgil, it is true, has followed Homer more closely, reducing, however, to line and measure the exuberances of his model,

and thus presenting the graces of regularity instead of the bold front of originality. But, although this attempt was crowned with success, and was in fact rather the introduction of a new species of writing, grounded upon the Grecian epic, than a strict imitation of Homer, the various bards who attempted to follow in the same path have been less fortunate.—Tasso, indeed, is an exception; but they who read him attentively will find they owe much of their pleasure to those passages in which the Æneid and Iliad are withdrawn from our recollection. The beautiful episode of Arminia is an incident of a pastoral nature, and the adventure of the enchanted forest a chapter in a metrical romance. To most Italians, and indeed to many other readers of poetry, Ariosto is more pleasing than Tasso; which certainly can only arise from the fatiguing corollary which the *Jerusalem Delivered* forms to the siege of Troy. Of later writers it is needless and would be invidious to speak. They load our shelves indeed, and are recorded in our catalogues; but who can say that the learned labours of Bossu, so admirably ridiculed by Pope, have added one readable poem to the literature of France or England? The harp of Mincio has made miserable music in the hands of Voltaire, Blackmore, and later worthies; and we may well use the expostulation of a living poet,—

> "Must sleepy bards the flattering dream prolong,
> Mechanic echoes of the Mantuan song,
> From truth and nature shall we widely stray,
> Where Virgil not where fancy leads the way?"

Here, therefore, is one road to the temple of fame, not indeed blockaded, but broken up and rendered impassable by the numbers who have trodden it. Similar changes have happened in other professions; and as popularity is at present sought by varying from the classic subjects of the ancients, by describing Gothic castles, modern cottages, and, as we shall presently see, Indian pagodas, so the painter who can no longer succeed by imitations of Raphael and Guido, gains the public applause by groups of peasants, fishers, and smugglers. This may cost the antiquary a sigh, and draw from the critic a stern rebuke; but, after all, it is but a specimen of the eternal operation of change, to which literature, like the globe itself, is necessarily subjected.

> "What man that sees the ever-whirling wheel
> Of change, the which all mortal things doth sway,
> But that thereby doth find and plainly feel
> How mutability in them doth play
> Her cruel sports to many men's decay?"

There are, however, as the same poet proceeds to inform us, laws by which mutability herself is regulated in her various and capricious movements, and which, therefore, may supply the critic with a code independent of her influence. Such laws, indeed, are to be drawn, not from the mechanical jargon of French criticism, but from an accurate consideration of the springs and movements of the human heart. These doubtless are changed and modified in the different stages of society, as the outward figure is disguised or altered by the progressive change of dress. But the nature of the human mind in the one case, as the conformation of the

limbs in the other, remains in fact unaltered; and, making allowance always for the particular stage of society, it is that to which we must finally appeal in censuring or approving poetical composition. The writings of the ancients may be then properly consulted, not as containing the authority by which their successors must be regulated, but as affording the happiest illustration of those general principles upon which poetry ought to be written. We can only slightly glance at this subject at present; but should we ever recur to it, it may not be difficult to prove, that the elder critics, in their pedantic veneration for the ancients, totally overlooked the real advantage to be derived from studying them, and thus, to speak the language of the schools, confounding the accidental and formal qualities with those which were essential to their poetry—drew the canons of criticism from the former instead of resorting to the latter, which it is no easy matter to analyze and define. Hence it has been laid down as a rule, that a modern should imitate Homer and Virgil in the subject, incident, and conduct of the story; instead of requiring him to emulate their spirit, upon a theme adapted to his own times, studies, and peculiar bent of genius.

We have been unavoidably led into this general line of reflection by the volume before us. The verses prefixed announce a determination in the author to step out of the common road of composition, and to put himself upon his country for the issue of his trespass, if there be one.

> "For I will for no man's pleasure,
> Change a syllable or measure.

Pedants shall not tie my strains
To our antique poets' veins;
Being born as free as these,
I will sing as I shall please."

This bold avowal is followed by a narrative poem, in twenty-four sections, of a nature powerfully interesting, and at the same time the most wild and uncommon which has hitherto fallen under our observation. The story is founded upon the Hindoo mythology, the most gigantic, cumbrous, and extravagant system of idolatry to which temples were ever erected. The scene is alternately laid in the terrestrial paradise, under the sea—in the heaven of heavens—and in hell itself. The principal actors are a man who approaches almost to omnipotence; another labouring under a strange and fearful malediction, which exempts him from the ordinary laws of nature; a good genius, a sorceress, and a ghost, with several Hindostan deities of different ranks. The only being that retains the usual attributes of humanity is a female, who is gifted with immortality at the close of the piece. That nothing in this extraordinary poem might resemble what had been written before, the measure is of a kind absolutely new in narrative poetry. It resembles that of *Thalaba* in structure; but being in rhyme, although the coincidences are of irregular occurrence, it may be best compared to the pindarics of Donne and Cowley; a measure which, if it sometimes disappoints the ear, does at others unexpectedly form the happiest and most beautiful combinations of harmony, and is, upon the whole, by its very wildness, excellently suited to the strange and irregular

magnificence of the descriptions which it is employed to convey.—But we hasten to give a sketch of the story.

It is necessary, first, to notice a peculiarity of the Hindoo religion, upon which Mr Southey has founded his poem. It is thus described in the preface :—

"Prayers, penances, and sacrifices, are supposed to possess an inherent and actual value, in no degree depending upon the disposition or motive of the person who performs them. They are drafts upon Heaven, for which the Gods cannot refuse payment. The worst men, bent upon the worst designs, have in this manner obtained power which has made them formidable to the Supremé Deities themselves, and rendered an *Avatar*, or incarnation of Vishnoo the Preserver, necessary."—*Pref.* pp. vii. viii.

The reader, then, is to suppose that Kehama, a mighty rajah, had, by a course of austere penances and extraordinary sacrifices, extorted from the deities of Hindostan a power which upon earth was already equal to their own. Neither did he therefore cease his devotions, which although offered with the worst and most malignant designs, and accepted by the deities with reluctance and terror, did nevertheless authorize him to claim from them still farther accessions of power. The gods, who observed that he continued by new austerities and sacrifices to make daily encroachments on their prerogatives, anticipated with growing alarm the period of their final subjection to this inexorable aspirant. The dreaded moment seemed not far remote ; for Kehama, having already acquired full power over the earth, was engaged in a series of mysterious sacrifices, the consummation of which would, by the conquest of Indra, subject the Swerga (the heaven of our earthly system), together with

all its tenantry of gods, to his authority.—His next object of ambition is to be the conquest of the regions of Padalon, the Hindoo Tartarus, where the Amreeta or drink of immortality was deposited; when he shall have possessed himself of this divine liquor, it will only remain that he should scale the empyreum, and struggle for the full power of divinity with Bramah, Vishnoo, and Seeva—the Trimourtee of the Bramins. But though thus elevated in present power, and yet more by future prospect above the lot of humanity, this mighty being was not yet exempted from the evils which attend it. Arvalan, his only son, whom he had secured from steel and fire, was slain with a stake by a peasant whose daughter he was attempting to violate. The poem opens with the following rich and brilliant description of the young rajah's funeral rites.

" Midnight, and yet no eye
Through all the Imperial City clos'd in sleep!
Behold her streets a-blaze
With light that seems to kindle the red sky,
Her myriads swarming through the crowded ways!
Master and slave, old age and infancy,
All, all abroad to gaze;
House-top and balcony
Clustered with women, who throw back their veils,
With unimpeded and insatiate sight
To view the funeral pomp which passes by,
As if the mournful rite
Were but to them a scene of joyance and delight.
Vainly, ye blessed twinklers of the night,
Your feeble beams ye shed,
Quench'd in the unnatural light which might out-star
Even the broad eye of day;
And thou from thy celestial way
Pourest, O Moon, an ineffectual ray!
For lo! ten thousand torches flame and flare
Upon the midnight air,
Blotting the lights of heaven

With one portentous glare.
Behold the fragrant smoke in many a fold,
Ascending floats along the fiery sky,
And hangeth visible on high,
A dark and waving canopy!
Hark, 'tis the funeral trumpet's breath!
'Tis the dirge of death!
At once ten thousand drums begin
With one long thunder peal the ear assailing;
Ten thousand voices then join in,
And with one deep and general din
Pour their wild wailing.
The song of praise is drown'd
Amid that deafening sound;
You hear no more the trumpet's tone,
You hear no more the mourner's moan,
Though the trumpet's breath, and the dirge of death,
Mingle and swell the funeral yell.
But rising over all in one acclaim
Is heard the echoed and re-echoed name,
From all that countless rout:
Arvalan! Arvalan!
Arvalan! Arvalan!
Ten times ten thousand voices in one shout
Call Arvalan! The overpowering sound
From house to house repeated rings about,
From tower to tower rolls round."

With equally glowing colours the author proceeds to describe the procession of the Bramins, and the appearance of the wives of Arvalan, who are doomed to share with him the funeral pile.—Their respective demeanour is marked with the masterly hand of genius, that loves to contrast the effects of the same fate upon different dispositions. Azla calmly takes her seat, while "young Nealliny" loudly invokes the compassion of the attendants, until she is bound by force to the dead body of her husband. The pile is fired with a solemnity at once awful and pathetic, by the hand of Kehama himself, amid

the noise of a thousand instruments of music, and the shouts of the immense multitude, which drown the cries of the living victims. When all is in one mass of flame, Kehama, moving towards the table of the dead, evokes the spirit of his slaughtered son. He appears, and a scene of recrimination takes place, in which they mutually reproach each other. At length Arvalan, after being endowed with all the attributes of which his spirit could be made participant, demands the farther boon of exemplary and lasting vengeance. Kehama then turns again to the pile, raises his hand to command silence, and orders the peasant and his daughter, who had been dragged in the train of the funeral procession, to be brought forth. Kailyal, the female, flies for aid to a rude image of Marriataly, the protecting goddess of the poor, which stood on the banks of the Ganges, where the funeral rites were performed. A thousand hands strive to tear her from the sanctuary, but the offended deity at once displaces her idol, and plunges it with the suppliant maiden and the sacrilegious violators of her rights, into the broad and rapid torrent below. Kehama, nothing moved, turns the whole of his wrath against the father Ladurlad, upon whom he pronounces the doom which gives name to the poem. The pause which precedes his revenge is horribly sublime, as well as the curse itself.

> "I charm thy life
> From the weapons of strife,
> From stone and from wood,
> From fire and from flood,
> From the serpent's tooth,
> And the beasts of blood:

From Sickness I charm thee,
And Time shall not harm thee,
But Earth which is mine,
Its fruits shall deny thee;
And Water shall hear me,
And know thee and fly thee;
And the Winds shall not touch thee,
When they pass by thee:
And the Dews shall not wet thee,
When they fall nigh thee:
And thou shalt seek Death
To release thee, in vain;
Thou shalt live in thy pain,
While Kehama shall reign,
With a fire in thy heart,
And a fire in thy brain;
And Sleep shall obey me,
And visit thee never,
And the Curse shall be on thee
For ever and ever."

Under this anathema Ladurlad stands motionless, hearing the sounds which formerly rang in his ear, seeing the multitude dispersing, and the funeral solemnity almost concluded, yet feeling that his dreadful fate had already begun to operate. Devoted to inexpressible bodily torture, and deprived not only of hope during life, but of death itself, he staggers wildly from the spot, and losing sight of the decaying fires and the bands of priests and soldiers which surrounded them, he moves, in solitary contemplation of his misery, along the banks of the river. Here he spies an object borne down by the current,—it is the image of Marriataly, to which his daughter still clings. Full of hope and joy he dashes into the waters, which obeyed Kehama, and retreated before him.—Blind to the miracle, he only thinks of Kailyal, and drags her

to shore, where the sad developement of their lot forms the subject of some beautiful stanzas, replete with poetry and natural and affectionate feeling.

Repeated trials convince Ladurlad of the sad reality of his curse. The water avoids his hand—the wind, which waves every leaf around him, is unfelt:—sleep will doubtless know the Rajah's spell, and fly from his victim—even the grave, the last refuge of the wretched, is denied. Wandering yet farther into the forest, Kailyal and her father recline near a tiger's haunt. The scene which follows is as impressive and affecting as the subject is wild and extraordinary. Ladurlad, for his daughter's sake, silently mans himself to endure the raging pain which attended his singular destiny, while Kailyal almost persuades herself, from the regularity of his breathing, that heaven had lent some respite to his sorrow, and in this hope sinks to rest. Ladurlad, who was awake, and felt the whole effects of the curse, now resolved to withdraw from his daughter, and save her the sight of his misery. He had hardly executed his purpose ere she awoke, and pursued him with all the agony of filial affection driven to despair. Her path is crossed by the spectre of Arvalan, who gifted by his sire with power to execute the foul purpose, in attempting which he had perished, pursues his prey into the temple of Pollear. This potent deity, incensed at the sacrilegious intrusion, seizes Arvalan in his grasp, and whirls him to an immense distance. Kailyal, ignorant of the power who had saved her, continues her flight, till she stumbles at

the roots of a manchineil, and lies like a corpse beneath its deadly shade. Here she must have perished; but a Glendoveer, or good genius, one of the most amiable of created intelligences, taking compassion on her forlorn state, bears her to Mount Himacoot, the abode of Casyapa, the Saturn of Hindostan, and father of all the inferior gods. The aged deity, who wants power to contend with Kehama, warns the Glendoveer of the risk of undertaking the protection of one persecuted by the tyrant, whose encroachments on the deities became every day more formidable. Charmed with the beauties and virtues which he has rescued, the Glendoveer determines not to abandon Kailyal, and conveys her in the "ship of heaven," one of the most awkward contrivances of the poem, to the Swerga or terrestrial paradise, the abode of Indra. Here also he meets a cold reception, for Indra trembles at Kehama. Kailyal prays to be returned to earth, that she may assuage, by participation, the lot of her father; and Indra, affected by her virtue, finally resolves to afford her and Ladurlad a temporary asylum.

> ——— "Where Ganges has its birth,
> Below our sphere and yet above the earth;
> There may Ladurlad rest beyond the power
> Of the dread Rajah till the fated hour."

The hour apprehended by Indra was fast approaching. Ninety-nine steeds had already bled on Seeva's altar, and when another victim should complete the sacrifice, the power of Kehama must supersede that of the sovereign of the Swerga. The horse destined for this purpose was carefully guarded; but the troops watched him at a distance

because the touch of human hand would render him unfit for the altar. He is driven forward by the contracting bands of archers, who only leave him a passage to the temple. His terror at the unaccustomed objects, and the deep silence with which an immense crowd watched for the completion of the sacrifice, are described in thrilling language. As Kehama lifts the axe, a man springs from the crowd to seize the hallowed steed. A thousand archers at once discharge their shafts; but they fall harmless from the invulnerable stranger, who mounts the steed, gallops round the circle, and renders the victim thus profaned totally unfit for the purpose of the sacrificer. The intruder is dragged to the feet of Kehama, but on him (for it was Ladurlad) the Rajah had already exercised all his vengeance. He therefore turned his fury on the troops, who did not prevent his intrusion; and a scene of blood ensues perfectly characteristic of Indian manners, and described with all the dreadful graces of poetry.

The consequences of this horrible massacre are painted with equal truth and sublimity.

> " The steam of slaughter from that place of blood
> Spread o'er the tainted sky.
> Vultures for whom the Rajah's tyranny
> So oft had furnished food, from far and nigh
> Sped to the lure: aloft with joyful cry
> Wheeling around, they hover'd over head;
> Or on the temple perch'd, with greedy eye,
> Impatient watch'd the dead.
> Far off the tigers in the inmost wood,
> Heard the death-shriek, and snuff'd the scent of blood.
> They rose, and through the covert went their way,
> Couch'd at the forest's edge, and waited for their prey."

Ladurlad mean while had wandered from the scene of cruelty, and almost unwittingly reached the habitation of his earlier days. This is one of the most beautiful passages of the poem, and displays, in an eminent degree, the art with which Mr Southey has contrived to unite the supernatural tone of his poem with the genuine feelings of humanity, and thus given the sufferings of Ladurlad an interest of which the utter impossibility of his case might otherwise seem to deprive him. The scene of former happiness, the recollection of his deceased wife and persecuted daughter, rush upon him with double force, at the sight of the desolation occasioned by his absence from what was once the spot of domestic peace. The distant mirth of his former neighbours, heard from the village market-place, is exquisitely described as acting upon the miserable man like an insult to his wretchedness, although he knew they were not aware of his presence. These sad reveries are interrupted by the apparition of Arvalan. This unrelenting spectre proceeds to new acts of insult, but is put to flight by Ereenia, the benevolent Glendoveer, who, in obedience to the commands of Indra, conveys Ladurlad to his daughter's temporary asylum at the holy source of the Ganges.

In the delicious groves which surround Mount Meru, the persecuted pair are joined by Yedillian, the deceased wife of Ladurlad, and mother of Kailyal; and the society thus strangely assembled, consisting of a genie, a ghost, and two mortals, continue a while in happiness, notwithstanding an attempt of the inveterate Arvalan, assisted by a

potent enchantress, to intrude upon their place of refuge. But in the opening of the twelfth section they are disturbed by the intelligence that Kehama is about to renew the sacrifice which had been interrupted, and that there was no safety for them in Mount Meru. The mortals return, the fiery curse again occupies the heart and brain of Ladurlad, and hardly do they stand upon middle earth when the blow is struck, and the sacrifice completed.

> " Around her Father's neck the Maiden lock'd
> Her arms, when that portentous blow was given;
> Clinging to him she heard the dread uproar,
> And felt the shuddering shock which ran through Heaven,
> Earth underneath them rock'd,
> Her strong foundations heaving in commotion,
> Such as wild winds upraise in raving Ocean,
> As though the solid base were rent asunder.
> And lo! where, storming the astonish'd sky,
> Kehama and his evil host ascend!
> Before them rolls the thunder,
> Ten thousand thousand lightnings round them fly,
> Upward the lengthening pageantries aspire,
> Leaving from Earth to Heaven a widening wake of fire."

Neither earth nor heaven was to afford Kailyal rest. A band of Yoguees or profligate priests seize her as a bride for Jaga-naut, in whose name they prosecute their infamous pleasures. Kailyal is led in a procession, which is described with magnificent luxuriance. She is imprisoned in the interior of the temple, and the chief Bramin approaches his prey, when he is anticipated by the spectre, who dashes him to earth, and occupies his dead body. The Glendoveer again appears, but is hurried off by the demons who attend the

son of Kehama. Kailyal sets fire to the pagoda, and Arvalan, who was now sensible to the flames, flies in dismay; while Ladurlad, fenced by his enemy's curse against the rage of every element, rushes through the conflagration, and rescues his daughter from its fury.

In the next section the father and daughter proceed to the release of the benevolent Glendoveer. Kailyal had learned from the exulting expressions of Arvalan, that he had imprisoned his rival in the sepulchre of an ancient monarch, Baly by name, whose capital had been overwhelmed by the ocean. The obscure yet wondrous remains of the submarine city are displayed in the most glowing and romantic colours. Ladurlad, over whom the sea had no power, enters gardens where earthly vegetation was replaced by a thousand marine productions which emulated all the splendours of Flora, and penetrated to the caverns where the race of the mighty Baly were deposited in death.

> "Deep in the marble rock, the Hall
> Of Death was hollowed out, a chamber wide,
> Low-roof'd, and long; on either side,
> Each in his own alcove, and on his throne,
> The Kings of old were seated: in his hand
> Each held the sceptre of command,
> From whence, across that scene of endless night,
> A carbuncle diffused its everlasting light."

At the extremity of this awful range of sepulchres he beholds Ereenia chained to the rock, and guarded by a huge sea monster, whose conflict with Ladurlad is one of the most (unnatural we cannot say) but unpleasing and useless prodigies in the poem. They struggle for a whole week,

the one secured by the anathema of Kehama, the other by his invulnerable scales. The contest finds a singular termination: "the beast must sleep or die;" and as Ladurlad presses too closely on him to admit of repose, the latter alternative becomes inevitable. Ladurlad now frees the Glendoveer, and they joyously ascend to the earth, where Kailyal awaited their return on the shore. The pleasure of their meeting is checked by the reappearance of the eternal Arvalan, on whom all former correction had been thrown away. At this nice moment Baly, who, in consequence of his virtues, had been constituted judge of Padalon (the Hindoo hell), happened to be taking his yearly walk upon earth, and, espying his advantage, seized upon Arvalan, his confederate enchantress, and their assistants; and without waiting for Kehama, who was hastening to the rescue of his son, regained the infernal territories, yet inaccessible to the Rajah's power, and secured his prisoners. Kehama, thus anticipated, meditates new persecutions for the unhappy Kailyal, whose hand he now demands for himself, alleging that he and she alone were destined to partake of the amreeta, or cup of immortality, which he speedily hoped to compel Yamen, the Pluto of the Bramin Tartarus, to deliver. The description of Kehama, when he softened his terrors, reminds us of the Satan of Milton, yet stands the comparison.

> "Pride could not quit his eye,
> Nor that remorseless nature from his front
> Depart: yet whoso had beheld him then
> Had felt some admiration mix'd with dread,

And might have said
That sure he seem'd to be the King of Men;
Less than the greatest that he could not be,
Who carried in his port such might and majesty."

His suit, though backed by the proffered recall of the fatal curse, is steadily rejected by Ladurlad and Kailyal, and he leaves them with an aggravated anathema.

The daring Glendoveer mean while had scaled Mount Calasay, the empyreum where Bramah, Vishnoo, and Seeva dwell in an abyss of light. Here he is directed to descend to the kingdom of Yamen, and await the unravelling of the will of destiny. Though this seemed but indifferent consolation, the Glendoveer, with Kailyal and her father, undertakes the melancholy journey. They cross the sea which divides middle earth from the realms of Yamen, and find upon the opposite shore the crowds who wait admittance into his dreary kingdom. Padalon was encircled by an icy mound. Eight gates gave access to this region of punishment, and at each the warders mounted double guard, apprehensive of the invasion of Kehama, who, having conquered earth and sky, now threatened hell itself. The visitors enter Padalon in a chariot, which hung self-balanced on a single wheel. Here the scene was altered.

"Far other light than that of day there shone,
Upon the travellers, entering Padalon.
They, too, in darkness entered on their way,
But, far before the Car,
A glow, as of a fiery furnace light,
Fill'd all before them. 'Twas a light which made

Darkness itself appear
A thing of comfort, and the sight dismay'd
Shrunk inward from the molten atmosphere.
Their way was through the adamantine rock
Which girt the World of Wo; on either side
Its massive walls arose, and overhead
Arch'd the long passage; onward as they ride,
With stronger glare the light around them spread,
And lo! the regions dread,
The World of Wo before them, opening wide."

The single-wheeled car crosses the fiery flood on a "rib of steel," sharp as the edge of a sabre, while the screams and torments of the damned in the gulf beneath are described with all the gloomy power of Dante. Even a new feature of terror is afforded to these accursed regions by the apprehended insurrection of their inhabitants, who, expecting the descent of Kehama, their deliverer, are with difficulty retained in subjection by multiplied guards and additional tortures. Through such sounds and sights of terror, the suppliants at length reach the judgment-seat of Yamen. His golden throne is propped at the three corners by three figures red-hot, yet retaining the form and sensations of humanity: the fourth corner is unsupported. As in this tottering state it could not afford a secure seat for the monarch of Padalon, Yamen had placed himself upon a huge marble sepulchre, the abode of his consort Azyoruca, who received into her hundred arms the souls whose doom her husband pronounced.

Yamen had scarcely welcomed the fugitives, when the approach of Kehama to storm his realms became manifest, and the tumult of hell, the clang of the tormentors' scourges, and the shrieks of the

sufferers, were lost in a dreadful interval of suspense.

> " The voice of lamentation ceased in Hell,
> And sudden silence all around them fell,
> Silence more wild and terrible
> Than all the infernal dissonance before:
> Through that portentous stillness, far away,
> Unwonted sounds were heard advancing on
> And deepening on their way."

This sublime passage announces the Rajah, and we could have wished that it had altogether superseded the account of his actual assault; which, though perfectly consonant to Hindoo superstition, is far too extravagant for a serious poem. Kehama, self-multiplied by the attribute of divine power which he had extorted from heaven, stood at the self-same moment before the eight gates of hell, stormed each of them at the same instant, and advanced, as it were, in eight columns over the eight causeways which led to the throne of Yamen. The penal fires grew pale before the lightnings which attended his career, and the thunders of hell were drowned in the louder terrors which proclaimed his march. The gates of the Hindoo pandæmonium are burst open, and the Rajah in all his forms surrounds its monarch.—The strife is judiciously veiled by darkness, but the issue is not long dubious. Kehama, having resumed his individuality, is discovered seated on the marble tomb, with Yamen under his feet. He demands of the three living statues who prop the golden throne, what they are, and for whom the fourth place is reserved. They answer by a description of their vices, and declare in chorus that the vacant corner is destined

for one equal in guilt to themselves, and that they had long looked for that one in Kehama. The Rajah smiled contemptuously, and ordered the amreeta to be brought forth: obedient to his voice, the marble sepulchre opened, and "a huge anatomy within its womb" presented the "cup of immortality."

The Rajah again invites Kailyal to partake his power, accompanied by a threat that if she refuses, her father shall supply the vacant place under the judgment-seat of Yamen. Both remain unmoved: "the resolute heart and virtuous will" oppose the tyrant even in the plenitude of his triumph over death and fate. Kehama had no sooner quaffed the amreeta, than he experienced the doom of his impious ambition:—immortality, happy immortality at least, could not be the meed of evil; the liquor ran through his veins in a stream of molten fire, torturing but not destroying his frame; and the Rajah, maugre his omnipotence, feels himself compelled to assume his place, the fourth burning column of the infernal throne. Kailyal now drinks; but the amreeta, of which the qualities were beneficent or malignant according to the properties of those who partook of it, did but consume the dross of humanity, and qualify her to enjoy immortal happiness with her beloved Ereenia. The god of death then casts his eye upon Ladurlad, who sinks at the glance into his last mortal slumber.

> "Blessed that sleep, more blessed was the waking,
> For on that night a heavenly morning broke;
> The light of heaven was round him when he woke,
> And in the Swerga in Yedillian's bower,
> All whom he loved he met to part no more."

Such is the termination of this singular poem, which, notwithstanding its wild and extravagant tenor, riveted our attention more powerfully than any thing which we have lately perused. It is difficult to adopt any certain rule of criticism with respect to a production so anomalous. In other cases we perceive the mark at which the author has aimed, and can therefore judge whether he has fallen short of it; but Mr Southey resembles Acestes, who shot merely to show the strength of his bow, and the height to which he could send his arrow.

——"Volans liquidis in nubibus arsit arundo
Signavitque viam flammis."

In this point of view, it is impossible to read the *Curse of Kehama* without conceiving the highest opinion of the author's force of imagination, and power of expression. The passages which we have quoted will bear us out in asserting, that no bard of modern days possesses a more abundant share of imagination, the highest of poetic qualities. There is a glow, an exuberancy even in his descriptions, indicating a richness of fancy adequate to supply the waste not of use only, but of extravagance; and perhaps it is a natural consequence of such attributes, that, like Collins, "he loves fairies, genii, giants, and monsters—delights to rove through the meanders of enchantment, to gaze on the magnificence of golden palaces, and to repose by the water-falls of Elysian gardens." To this taste we owe the "wild and wondrous tale" of *Thalaba*, and the still more wild and wondrous *Curse of Kehama*. If we compare these extraordinary poems

we shall find, that though they bear the same relation to each other as those paintings which are termed companions, their leading features are nevertheless different. The mythology of *Thalaba* is drawn from a source with which we became early acquainted. Turbans and scimitars, caliphs and viziers, dervises and calendars, mosques and minarets, the practice and almost the theory of the Moslem religion, are familiar to us, from those delightful days when awakening fancy first rioted on the banquet of fictitious narrative. But what the *Curse of Kehama* wants in the charm of early prepossession, it enjoys in the more important quality of edification. The Hindoo religion, of which Europeans, nay, Indo-Europeans, know little, excepting from the ponderous labours of a few literati, is not only curious as one of the most ancient existing superstitions, but particularly interesting, as regulating the religious belief and moral practice of millions, whom treaty or conquest has united to the British empire.

But it must not be understood, while we are thus expressing our thanks for the form in which so much instruction is conveyed to us, that we consider Mr Southey as having employed the energies of his genius, and the treasures of his knowledge, in constructing a tale which should have no higher object than to introduce to the world *the Hindoo mythology, made plain and easy to the meanest capacity.* The poet, we apprehend, had discovered, that on this mythology he could raise such a fabric as he now presents to us—that he could reduce its unwieldy and disjointed parts into some kind of

form—and, divesting of extravagance what he found in it of sublimity, employ the means, which a particular superstition offered to his hands, in the production of a work which should excite an interest as universal as that of the most probable fable. And here we feel that our highest tribute of praise is due to Mr Southey, as a poet and a man. In whatever degree the cause of virtue and of morals —and we must be blind indeed not to discover his uniform exertions on their side—has been indebted to him heretofore, it has now to acknowledge far more splendid services. His heroine does not owe triumph to supernatural interpositions, founded on principles of which the developement can neither increase our interest nor admiration. From the Gods she could derive but little assistance; for, till the final incident of the poem takes place, the *victrix causa* seems to be that of their enemy. Heaven itself stands in need of Ladurlad; and, together with him, she is identified with the interests of its inhabitants. Whence, then, springs this union ultimately so effectual in baffling the ambitious purposes of Kehama? The answer is obvious;—from the moral character of Kailyal, which is perpetually opposed to the inordinate attempts, and almost omnipotent wickedness of the Rajah. His persecutions serve only to increase her patience and piety, and to turn her mind into itself in search of means of defence against her singular calamities. To the moral agency of this principle the poem owes its grandeur, at once splendid and severe.

A work which combines with circumstances of this nature a powerful imaginative character, has

certainly advanced far towards perfection in one of the chief objects of poetry—the elevation of the human mind; which is thus for a time lifted above the sphere of common life, its low pursuits and passions, and carried into an empyreum of fancy, where it may rove at will through blissful regions of its own creation. It is impossible for a reader of feeling to rise from such a poem without being sensible of this abstraction; without a consciousness that he has at least enjoyed a glimpse of virtue —that his heart has been warmed by her influence —and that, however transient this influence might be, it brought with it a conviction of the existence of that divine original from which it sprung. Poetry, indeed, cannot create a soil for virtue to take root in; but whenever it appears in its loftier character, it seldom fails to invigorate and enrich that in which it is already implanted.

Some remarks upon the conduct of the work will naturally be expected from us. In this Mr Southey had to struggle with two great difficulties. The poem being entirely mythological, and the agents, generally speaking, having little in common with humanity, it must, at first sight, seem difficult to preserve that interest in the action of the piece which forms the principal charm of narrative. The poet, whose heart is always true to moral feeling, has overcome this disadvantage by the beautiful picture of filial affection exhibited in the amiable and virtuous Kailyal. It is this secret charm which gives interest to the adventures of the persecuted pair, remote as they are from all resemblance to possibility. The purity, simplicity, and self-devotion

of this injured female sanctify her, as it were, in our fancy; nor can we consider as overstrained the beautiful passage in which her virtue, like that of Spenser's Una, is described as subjugating brute ferocity:—

> "A charm was on the leopard, when he came
> Within the circle of that mystic glade;
> Submiss he crouch'd before the heavenly maid,
> And offered to her touch his speckled side;
> Or with arched back erect, and bending head,
> And eyes half-closed for pleasure, would he stand,
> Courting the pressure of her gentle hand."

The portrait of Ladurlad is also interesting, though in a less degree. The imagination is unable to receive the idea of intolerable torture existing for such a length of time; and although the poet has judiciously broken the spell by intervals of repose, yet when we consider the exertions made in the delivery of the Glendoveer, we are led to suspect that the pain had become sufferable by endurance. The love of the Glendoveer reminded us of the Comte de Gabalis, and of Pope, who adapted to comic machinery the attachment of his airy beings. It is, perhaps, less fitted to serious poetry; for so inseparable are our ideas even of sentimental affection, from the pangs of jealousy and the tumults of desire, that we can hardly conceive love, in the sense usually affixed to the word, existing between two beings of different natures, any more than between two persons of the same sex. But as Satan is the hero of Paradise Lost, so Kehama, partaking of his haughty and ambitious character, and exceeding him in power, is far the most prominent figure in the poem. Mr Southey has happily embodied

his conception of an human being approaching in power to a divinity, in malignity to the evil principle. Severer critics may, however, censure the passage in the seventeenth section, where Baly carries off Arvalan; and where the Rajah, instead of attempting his rescue, proposes himself as a suitor to Kailyal, and thus altogether changes the motive of her persecution. Even when Kehama had subdued the god of hell, we hear nothing of his releasing Arvalan, although his affection for him is the main cause of the curse of Ladurlad. But we are more inclined to censure the conclusion of Kehama's career, as inconsistent with the dignity of his character and the extent of his powers. Something like the same incident is to be found in one of the tales of the Genii, where the waters of oblivion prove the waters of death; but this is more ingenious than the expedient by which Seeva humbles Kehama in the very height of his triumph. After all, a similar objection would probably have occurred to any manner in which the tale could be concluded: for as Kehama had been almost raised to a level with Omnipotence, it would not be easy to devise any adequate mode of accomplishing his overthrow.

A second difficulty which Mr Southey had to encounter, is that of adapting the vast and clumsy fabric of Indian mythology to the purposes of English poetry. We have observed the advantages which this presented; and the inconveniences are pointed out by the poet himself, when he acknowledges the anti-picturesque exterior of the Hindoo deities, and the frantic extravagance of the fables in

which they are agents. Neither does he disguise the obvious objection, that the English reader may be startled by being plunged at once into a new and unknown system. The last difficulty Mr Southey has removed by a list of those deities who occupy a place among his dramatis personæ, and by distinguishing the character and functions of each. The other inconvenience was not so easily parried. Mr Southey has, indeed, generally speaking, chosen the most pleasing of the Hindoo traditions. But while plunging into such an abyss of monstrous and outrageous fictions, the poet, perhaps, became more familiarized with the Eastern style than was quite consistent with the necessary severity of selection, and we have been not a little startled at some of the topics which he has chosen to celebrate. We have already stated our objections to the eight-days' combat of Ladurlad with the sea-monster, and to the self-multiplication of Kehama, on his storming Padalon. We would have included in our expurganda Indra's elemental palace, built partly of fire, partly of water, had not the poetry been so exquisitely beautiful as to excuse extravagance itself: but a globe which the sorceress Lorrinite composed of the pupils of human eyes, we must condemn without mercy. We would also send to the Remise a certain infernal car, which, as it only moved on one wheel, must have been a precarious vehicle, even if it had traversed a road broader than the edge of a scimitar. The description of Mount Calasay, a silver hill, with seven silver ladders, is too much like a tale of Madame D'Aunois; and we cannot help remark-

ing, that Yamen-pur, the metropolis of the infernal regions, being made of a single diamond, is the more brilliant habitation of the two. Accustomed as we are to the Grecian Cupid, we cannot reconcile ourselves to Camdeo's bowstring, which being composed of live bees, must have been singularly ill adapted to the purposes of archery; nor are we at all pleased with the bees breaking off upon one occasion, and hiving upon Kailyal's head. These and similar imperfections, however, were almost inseparable from a plan laid in the wildest regions of fiction. The Greeks alone have contrived to reconcile to grace, and to a decent probability, their mythological fables, while the Hindoos have, of all nations, run farthest into the extremes of tumid and unimaginable absurdity.

We can the more readily pardon Mr Southey for following, in a few instances, the bad taste of his model; because one of his principal beauties is derived from the uncommon art with which he has maintained the character of a poet of Hindostan. We have scarcely been able to find a passage, in which we are reminded that the bard is a European. The ornaments, the landscape, the animals, the similes, the language, the sentiments, are Oriental; selected, indeed, and arranged with more art than any Eastern poet could have displayed; but still composed of the very materials which he must necessarily have employed. This observation of manners and costume, is carried still farther than in Madoc. There the poet established among his imaginary Atzeucas, various rites observed in different parts of America; but

here, where materials were more amply supplied, his manners and sentiments are not merely Oriental, but so distinctly and exclusively Hindoo, that they could be properly ascribed to no other Indian faith, and would be misplaced, had the story respected Mahometans, Thibetians, or Parsees. The genius and moral feeling of the author are, indeed, visibly superior to the colours with which he works; yet this superiority cannot be perceived from the Englishman breaking forth in any particular passage; but from the general light diffused over the whole picture, like that communicated by the sun to nature upon those days in which his orb is not visible.

Weighing, therefore, the beauties, and the imperfections connected with the author's plan, the former will be found to preponderate in a very great degree. But could not Mr Southey have selected some subject, admitting all that is excellent, and excluding all that is extravagant in his poem? We should be deficient indeed in our art, if we could not answer in the affirmative. As Mr Southey himself, however, was to write the poem, it is only reverence for the reader's leisure, which prevents our demanding that he shall choose for his next theme, one which will allow him to display the sublimity of Homer, the majesty of Virgil, the fancy of Ariosto, the chaste taste of Tasso, the solemnity of Dante, and all the attributes of all the first poets. But would our advice be reasonable? Or rather, would it not resemble the resolution of the mad monarch, the execution of which he wisely commits to his ministers?

> " He shall have chariots easier than air,
> *Which I will have invented*——
> And thou shalt ride before him, on a horse
> Cut out of an entire diamond,
> That shall be made to go with golden wheels
> *I know not how yet.*"————————

This is the false gallop of criticism—it is not pointing out to an author any reasonable object to be attained; but insidiously hinting at some unknown point of excellence, with whose bearings we doubtless are acquainted, though we kindly leave the poet to find them out as he can. In this we see neither wit nor wisdom: and shame on our craft if this finesse be its excellence! In judging of every human production, we can only estimate how far it exceeds or falls short of the common exertions of humanity; and it shows equal ignorance and injustice to attempt reducing it to the imaginary standard of some *beau idéal*, of which neither the author nor the critic has any distinct or accurate perception.

We have already noticed the singular style of versification employed in this poem, which resembles the Pindarics of the seventeenth century. In the construction and return of his language, and even of his modulations, we observe a marked imitation of Milton, and there are passages in which the sense also approaches very nearly to that of our great classic. The flight of Arvalan, when

> " Thrice through the vulnerable shade
> The Glendoveer impels the griding blade," &c.

inevitably recalls the *griding* sword of Michael. The beautiful retreat of the celestial inhabitants

from the profaned Swerga, reminded us of the secession of the Hamadryads in the hymn to the *Nativity*. But Mr Southey, though we can discern that Milton is his favourite poet, is in no respect a servile imitator of his sublime model. His picture of the infernal regions may stand comparison with any poetic vision of those penal fires, from the days of Homer to those of Klopstock. The description hovers between that of Dante and Milton; not exhibiting the tedious particularity of the former, yet more detailed than that of the latter. The approach of the mortals to Padalon seems to us equal in grandeur to any passage which we ever perused. We will quote a few lines and close our criticism, though our subject is far from being exhausted.

"Far other light than that of day there shone
Upon the travellers entering Padalon.
They, too, in darkness entered on their way,
But, far before the Car,
A glow, as of a fiery furnace light,
Fill'd all before them. 'Twas a light which made
Darkness itself appear
A thing of comfort, and the sight, dismay'd,
Shrunk inward from the molten atmosphere.
Their way was through the adamantine rock
Which girt the World of Wo; on either side
Its massive walls arose, and overhead
Arch'd the long passage; onward as they ride,
With stronger glare, the light around them spread,
And lo! the regions dread,
The World of Wo before them, opening wide.

There rolls the fiery flood,
Girding the realms of Padalon around.
A sea of flame it seem'd to be,
Sea without bound;
For neither mortal, nor immortal sight,
Could pierce across through that intensest light."

The notes contain a profusion of Eastern learning, and the massive blocks which Mr Southey has selected as specimens of Bramanical poetry and mythology, give us at once an idea of the immense quarries, in which the author must have laboured, and of the taste, skill, and labour necessary to fashion such unwieldy materials into the beautiful forms which they exhibit in the text.

Every theme, however pleasing, has its bounds, and we must bid farewell to Mr Southey, grateful for the pleasure afforded us. We can presage nothing as to the popularity of the present poem. Its faults lie on the surface, and are of a kind obnoxious to sarcasm and malicious ridicule. But its beauties are infinite, and it possesses that high qualification for popularity, the power of exciting a painful and sustained interest. There are still, surely, among us those who will tolerate the eccentricities of genius, in consideration of its lofty properties—properties which distinguish all the works of the poet; but which shine forth with transcendant lustre, in the Curse of Kehama.

Before we quit the poem, we are bound to notice the novel and beautiful manner in which it is printed. In general a page of poetry is displeasing to fastidious eyes, from the irregular terminations of the lines; this deformity is not only obviated, but a remarkable elegance in the typographic art is introduced in its stead. The centre of every verse is so placed, as to preserve an equal breadth of margin on each side, and to give the page a kind of lapidary appearance, which is singularly striking and agreeable, even before the cause of it is discovered.

We hope that every "wire wove, hot pressed" poem, composed upon this model, will be printed with the same attention to picturesque beauty, as the Curse of Kehama, which has led the way to the only improvement of which the art of printing, in its present advanced state, is, perhaps, susceptible.

ARTICLE XIII.

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE. CANTO IV.

[*From the Quarterly Review for* 1818. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto IV.* By LORD BYRON.]

"Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been—
A sound which makes us linger;—yet—farewell!
Ye! who have traced the Pilgrim to the scene
Which is his last, if in your memories dwell
A thought which once was his, if on ye swell
A single recollection, not in vain
He wore his sandal-shoon, and scallop-shell;
Farewell! with *him* alone may rest the pain,
If such there were—with *you*, the moral of his strain!"

THIS solemn valediction, the concluding stanza of Lord Byron's poem, forms at once a natural and an impressive motto to our essay. "There are few things," says the moralist, "not purely evil, of which

we can say, without some emotion of uneasiness, *this is the last.* Those who could never agree together shed tears when mutual discontent has determined them to final separation, and of a place that has been frequently visited, though without pleasure, the last look is taken with heaviness of heart." When we resume, therefore, our task of criticism, and are aware that we are exerting it for the last time upon this extraordinary work, we feel no small share of reluctance to part with the Pilgrim, whose wanderings have so often beguiled our labours, and diversified our pages. We part from *Childe Harold* as from the pleasant and gifted companion of an interesting tour, whose occasional waywardness, obstinacy, and caprice are forgotten in the depth of thought with which he commented upon subjects of interest as they passed before us, and in the brilliancy with which he coloured such scenery as addressed itself to the imagination. His faults, if we at all remember them, are recollected only with pity, as affecting himself indeed, but no longer a concern of ours:—his merits acquire double value in our eyes when we call to mind that we may perhaps never more profit by them. The scallop-shell and staff are now laid aside, the pilgrimage is accomplished, and Lord Byron, in his assumed character, is no longer to delight us with the display of his wondrous talents, or provoke us by the use he sometimes condescends to make of them,—a use which at times has reminded us of his own powerful simile,

> "It was as is a new-dug grave,
> Closing o'er one we sought to save."

Before we part, however, we feel ourselves impelled to resume a consideration of his *Pilgrimage*, not as consisting of detached accounts of foreign scenery and of the emotions suggested by them, but as a whole poem, written in the same general spirit, and pervaded by the same cast of poetry. In doing this, we are conscious we must repeat much which has perhaps been better said by others, and even be guilty of the yet more unpardonable crime of repeating ourselves. But if we are not new we will at least be brief, and the occasion seems to us peculiarly favourable for placing before our readers the circumstances which secured to the Pilgrimage of Childe Harold a reception so generally popular. The extrinsic circumstances, which refer rather to the state of the public taste than to the genius and talent of the author, claim precedence in order, because, though they are not those on which the fame of the poet must ultimately rest, they are unquestionably the scaffolding by means of which the edifice was first raised which now stands independent of them.

Originality, as it is the highest and rarest property of genius, is also that which has most charms for the public. Not that originality is always necessary, for the world will be contented, in the poverty of its mental resources, with mere novelty or singularity, and must therefore be enchanted with a work that exhibits both qualities. The vulgar author is usually distinguished by his treading, or attempting to tread, in the steps of the reigning favourite of the day. He is didactic, sentimental, romantic, epic, pastoral, according to the

taste of the moment, and his "fancies and delights," like those of Master Justice Shallow, are sure to be adapted to the tunes *which the carmen whistle*. The consequence is, not that the herd of imitators gain their object, but that the melody which they have profaned becomes degraded in the sated ears of the public—its original richness, wildness, and novelty are forgotten when it is made manifest how easily the leading notes can be caught and parodied, and whatever its intrinsic merit may have been, it becomes, for the time, stale and fulsome. If the composition which has been thus hunted down possesses intrinsic merit, it may—indeed it will—eventually revive and claim its proper place amid the poetical galaxy; deprived, indeed, of the adventitious value which it may at first have acquired from its novelty, but at the same time no longer overshaded and incumbered by the crowd of satellites now consigned to chaos and primæval night. When the success of Burns, writing in his native dialect with unequalled vigour and sweetness, had called from their flails an hundred peasants to cudgel their brains for rhymes, we can well remember that even the bard of Coila was somewhat injured in the common estimation—as a masterpiece of painting is degraded by being placed amid the flaring colours and ill-drawn figures of imitative daubers. The true poet attempts the very reverse of the imitator. He plunges into the stream of public opinion even when its tide is running strongest, crosses its direction, and bears his crown of laurel as Cæsar did his imperial mantle, triumphant above the waves. Such a phenomenon seldom fails at first

to divide and at length to alter the reigning taste of the period, and if the bold adventurer has successfully buffeted the ebbing tide which bore up his competitor, he soon has the benefit of the flood in his own favour.

In applying these general remarks to Lord Byron's gravest and most serious performance, we must recall to the reader's recollection that since the time of Cowper he has been the first poet who, either in his own person, or covered by no very thick disguise, has directly appeared before the public, an actual living man expressing his own sentiments, thoughts, hopes, and fears. Almost all the poets of our day, who have possessed a considerable portion of public attention, are personally little known to the reader, and can only be judged from the passions and feelings assigned by them to persons totally fictitious. Childe Harold appeared—we must not say in the character of *the* author—but certainly in that of a real existing person, with whose feelings as such the public were disposed to associate those of Lord Byron. Whether the reader acted right or otherwise in persisting to neglect the shades of distinction which the author endeavoured to point out betwixt his pilgrim and himself, it is certain that no little power over the public attention was gained from their being identified. Childe Harold may not be, nor do we believe he is, Lord Byron's very self, but he is Lord Byron's picture, sketched by Lord Byron himself, arrayed in a fancy dress, and disguised perhaps by some extrinsic attributes, but still bearing a sufficient resemblance to the original to warrant the conclusion that we

have drawn. This identity is so far acknowledged in the preface to the Canto now before us, where Lord Byron thus expresses himself.

"The poem also, or the pilgrim, or both, have accompanied me from first to last; and perhaps it may be a pardonable vanity which induces me to reflect with complacency on a composition which in some degree connects me with the spot where it was produced, and the objects it would fain describe; and however unworthy it may be deemed of those magical and memorable abodes, however short it may fall of our distant conceptions and immediate impressions, yet as a mark of respect for what is venerable, and of feeling for what is glorious, it has been to me a source of pleasure in the production, and I part with it with a kind of regret, which I hardly suspected that events could have left me for imaginary objects."—Pp. vi. vii.

But besides the pleasing novelty of a traveller and a poet, throwing before the reader his reflections and opinions, his loves and his hates, his raptures and his sorrows; besides the novelty and pride which the public felt, upon being called as it were into familiarity with a mind so powerful, and invited to witness and partake of its deep emotions; the feelings themselves were of a character which struck with awe those to whom the noble pilgrim thus exposed the sanctuary of his bosom. They were introduced into no Teian paradise of lutes and maidens, were placed in no hall resounding with music and dazzling with many-coloured lights, and called upon to gaze on those gay forms that flutter in the muse's beam. The banquet had ceased, and it was the pleasure of its melancholy lord that his guests should witness that gloominess, which seems most dismal when it succeeds to exuberant and unrestrained gaiety. The emptied wine-cup lay on the ground, the withered garland was flung

aside and trodden under foot, the instruments of music were silent, or waked but those few and emphatic chords which express sorrow; while, amid the ruins of what had once been the palace of pleasure, the stern pilgrim stalked from desolation to desolation, spurning from him the implements of former luxury, and repelling with equal scorn the more valuable substitutes which wisdom and philosophy offered to supply their place. The reader felt as it were in the presence of a superior being, when, instead of his judgment being consulted, his imagination excited or soothed, his taste flattered or conciliated in order to bespeak his applause, he was told, in strains of the most sublime poetry, that neither he, the courteous reader, nor aught the earth had to show, was worthy the attention of the noble traveller.—All countries he traversed with a heart for entertaining the beauties of nature, and an eye for observing the crimes and follies of mankind; and from all he drew subjects of sorrow, of indignation, of contempt. From Dan to Beersheba all was barrenness. To despise the ordinary sources of happiness, to turn with scorn from the pleasures which captivate others, and to endure, as it were voluntarily, evils which others are most anxious to shun, is a path to ambition; for the monarch is scarcely more respected for possessing, than the anchoret for contemning the means of power and of pleasure. A mind like that of Harold, apparently indifferent to the usual enjoyments of life, and which entertains, or at least exhibits, such contempt for its usual pursuits, has the same ready road to the respect of the mass of mankind, who

judge that to be superior to humanity which can look down upon its common habits, tastes, and pleasures.

This fashion of thinking and writing of course had its imitators, and those right many. But the humorous sadness which sat so gracefully on the original made but a poor and awkward appearance on those who

> ——"wrapp'd themselves in 'Harold's' inky cloak,
> To show the world how 'Byron' did *not* 'write.'"

Their affected melancholy showed like the cynicism of Apemantus contrasted with the real misanthropy of Timon. And, to say the truth, we are not sorry that the fashion has latterly lost ground. This species of general contempt of intellectual pleasures, and worldly employment, is more closely connected with the Epicurean philosophy than may be at first supposed. If philosophy be but a pursuit of words, and the revolutions of empires inevitable returns of the same cycle of fearful transitions; if our earliest and best affections "run to waste, and water but the desert," the want of worthier motives to action gives a tremendous and destructive impulse to the dangerous *Carpe diem* of the Garden—that most seductive argument of sensual pleasure. This doctrine of the nothingness of human pursuits, not as contrasted with those of religion and virtue (to which they are indeed as nothing), but absolutely and in themselves, is too apt to send its pupils in despair to those pleasures which promise a real gratification, however short and gross. Thus do thoughts and opinions, in themselves the most melancholy, become incite-

ments to the pursuit of the most degrading pleasures; as the Egyptians placed skulls upon their banqueting tables, and as the fools of Holy Writ made the daring and fearful association of imminent fate and present revelling—*Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.*

If we treat the humour less gravely, and consider it as a posture of the mind assumed for the nonce, still this enumeration of the vain pursuits, the indulged yet unsatiated passions of humanity, is apt to weary our spirits if not our patience, and the discourse terminates in a manner as edifying as the dialogue in Prior's Alma:

> "'Tired with these thoughts'—'Less tired than I,'
> Quoth Dick, 'with your philosophy—
> That people live and die I knew,
> An hour ago as well as you;
> What need of books those truths to tell,
> Which folks perceive who cannot spell?
> And must we spectacles apply,
> To view what hurts our naked eye?
> If to be sad is to be wise,
> I do most heartily despise
> Whatever Socrates has said,
> Or Tully wrote, or Wanley read.'
> 'Dear Drift! to set our matters right,
> Remove these papers from my sight,
> Burn Mat's Des-carte and Aristotle—
> Here, Jonathan, your master's bottle.'"

But it was not merely to the novelty of an author speaking in his own person, and in a tone which arrogated a contempt of all the ordinary pursuits of life, that "Childe Harold" owed its extensive popularity: these formed but the point or sharp edge of the wedge by which the work was enabled to insinuate its way into that venerable block, the

British public. The high claims inferred at once in the direct appeal to general attention, and scorn of general feeling, were supported by powers equal to such pretensions. He who despised the world intimated that he had the talents and genius necessary to win it if he had thought it worth while. There was a strain of poetry in which the sense predominated over the sound; there was the eye keen to behold nature, and the pen powerful to trace her varied graces of beauty or terror; there was the heart ardent at the call of freedom or of generous feeling, and belying every moment the frozen shrine in which false philosophy had incased it, glowing like the intense and concentrated alcohol, which remains one single but burning drop in the centre of the ice which its more watery particles have formed. In despite of the character which he had assumed, it was impossible not to see in the Pilgrim what nature designed him to be, and what, in spite of bad metaphysics and worse politics, he may yet be, a person whose high talents the wise and virtuous may enjoy without a qualifying sigh or frown. Should that day arrive, and if time be granted, it will arrive, we who have ventured upon the precarious task of prophecy—we who have been censured for not mingling the faults of genius with its talents—we shall claim our hour of heartfelt exultation. He himself, while deprecating censure on the ashes of another great but self-neglected genius, has well pleaded the common cause of those who, placed high above the crowd, have their errors and their follies rendered more conspicuous by their elevation.

"Hard is his fate on whom the public gaze
Is fix'd for ever to detract or praise;
Repose denies her requiem to his name,
And Folly loves the martyrdom of Fame:
The secret enemy, whose sleepless eye
Stands sentinel, accuser, judge, and spy;
Her for the fool, the jealous and the vain,
The envious, who but breathe in others' pain:
Behold the host delighting to deprave,
Who track the steps of Glory to the grave."

For ourselves, amid the various attendants on the triumph of genius, we would far rather be the soldier who, pacing by the side of the general, mixes, with military frankness, censure amid his songs of praise, than the slave in his chariot to flatter his vanity by low adulation, or exasperate his feelings by virulent invective. In entering our protest therefore against the justice and the moral tendency of that strain of dissatisfaction and despondency, that cold and sceptical philosophy which clouds our prospects on earth, and closes those beyond it, we willingly render to this extraordinary poem the full praise that genius in its happiest efforts can demand from us.

The plan, if it can be termed so, hovers between that of a descriptive and a philosophical poem. The pilgrim passes from land to land, alternately describing, musing, meditating, exclaiming, and moralizing; and the reader, partaking of his enthusiasm, becomes almost the partner of his journey. The first and second Cantos were occupied by Spain and Greece—the former, the stage upon which those incidents were then passing which were to decide, in their consequence, the fate of existing Europe; the latter, the country whose sun, so

long set, has yet left on the horizon of the world such a blaze of splendour. It is scarcely necessary to say, that in both countries, but especially in the last, the pilgrim found *room for meditation even to madness.* The third Canto saw Childe Harold once more upon the main, and traced him from Belgium to Switzerland, through scenes distinguished by natural graces, and rendered memorable by late events. Through this ample field we accompanied the Pilgrim, and the strains which describe the beauties of the Rhine and the magnificence of the Leman lake, are still glowing in our ears. The fourth Canto now appears, and recalls us to the immediate object of the present article.

The poem opens in Venice, once the mart of the universe—

> " I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
> A palace and a prison on each hand:
> I saw from out the wave her structures rise
> As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:
> A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
> Around me, and a dying Glory smiles
> O'er the far times, when many a subject land
> Look'd to the winged Lion's marble piles,
> Where Venice sate in state, thron'd on her hundred isles!"

The former greatness of this queen of commerce is described and mingled with the recollections associated with her name, from the immortal works of fiction of which she has formed the scene.

> " But unto us she hath a spell beyond
> Her name in story, and her long array
> Of mighty shadows, whose dim forms despond
> Above the Dogeless city's vanish'd sway;
> Ours is a trophy which will not decay
> With the Rialto; Shylock and the Moor,

And Pierre, can not be swept or worn away—
The keystones of the arch! though all were o'er,
For us repeopled were the solitary shore.

"The beings of the mind are not of clay;
Essentially immortal, they create
And multiply in us a brighter ray
And more beloved existence: that which Fate
Prohibits to dull life, in this our state
Of mortal bondage, by these spirits supplied,
First exiles, then replaces what we hate;
Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,
And with a fresher growth replenishing the void."

That this is true in philosophy as well as beautiful in poetry; that fiction as well as reality can impress local associations of the most fascinating kind, that not alone the birth-place or tomb of the man of genius, but the scenes which he has chosen for the action of his story remain dear "to our memories," and have to our ears and eyes a fascinating charm, was repeatedly experienced during the Peninsular war. Spain, separated by the ocean and the Pyrenees from the rest of Europe, and seldom in collision with Britain, save when we have encountered her fleets upon the seas, lying also beyond the ordinary course of travellers and tourists, has little familiar to us as readers of history, or as members of British society. But the authors of fiction had given associations to this country of the most interesting kind, to supply the deficiencies of the slender list afforded by history or conversation. The British officers rushed with the eagerness of enthusiasm to find in the tower of Segovia the apartment from which Gil Blas, in his captivity, looked over the wanderings of the Ebro:—even the French dealt mildly with

the city of Toboso, because it had given name to the celebrated Dulcinea; and amid the romantic deserts of the Sierra Morena the weary step was rendered lighter to the readers of Cervantes, who, at every turn of their march among the landscapes which he has described with such exquisite truth and felicity, expected to see the doughty knight-errant and his trusty squire, or the beautiful vision of Dorothea, when she was surprised in boy's attire washing her feet in the rivulet. Such is the prerogative of genius! and well may it be celebrated by one who has himself impressed associations upon so much scenery, which will never, while Britons speak their present language, be seen without recollecting the Pilgrim and his musings.

The contrast of the former and present state of Venice calls forth naturally a train of moral reflections suitable to the occasion; but the noble Pilgrim, standing on the Bridge of Sighs, and having beneath his feet the dungeons of the most jealous aristocracy that ever existed; in the vicinity also of the palace of the Council of Ten, and of those "lions' mouths," by means of which the most treacherous and base of anonymous informers possessed full power over the life and fortune of the noblest citizens, might have spared his regret for the loss of that freedom which Venice never possessed. The distinction, in this and many other cases, betwixt a free and an independent nation, is not sufficiently observed. The Venetians were never a free people, though the state of Venice was not only independent, but wealthy and power-

ful, during the middle ages, by the extent of her commerce and the policy of her wise rulers. But commerce found a more convenient channel round the Cape of Good Hope for that trade which Venice had hitherto carried on. Her rulers overrated her strength, and engaged in a war against the confederated force of Italy, from the consequences of which, though gloriously sustained, the state never recovered. The proud republic, whose bride was the Adriatic, shared the fate of Tyre and Sidon—of all nations whose wealth and grandeur are founded exclusively on ships, colonies, and commerce. The "crowning city, whose merchants were princes, and whose traffickers were the honourable of the earth," had long passed into a state of the third class, existing merely because not demolished, and ready to give way to the first impulse of outward force. The art of the Venetian rulers in stooping to their circumstances, and bending where they must otherwise have broken, could only protract this semblance of independence until the storm of the French Revolution destroyed Venice, among many other governments which had been respected by other conquerors from a reverence to antiquity, or from a regard for existing institutions, the very reverse of the principle which actuated the republican generals. It is surely vain to mourn for a nation which, if restored to independence, could not defend or support itself; and it would be worse than vain, were it possible, to restore the Signoria, with all its oligarchical terrors of denunciation, and secret imprisonment, and judicial murder. What is to be wished for

Italy, is the amalgamation of its various petty states into one independent and well-governed kingdom, capable of asserting and maintaining her place among the nations of Europe. To this desirable order of things nothing can be a stronger obstacle than the reinstatement of the various petty divisions of that fair country, each incapable of defending itself, but ready to lend its aid to destroy its neighbours.

Of Italy, in its present state, it is impossible to think or speak without recognising the truth as well as the beauty of the following lines.

> " The commonwealth of kings, the men of Rome!
> And even since, and now, fair Italy!
> Thou art the garden of the world, the home
> Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;
> Even in thy desert, what is like to thee?
> Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
> More rich than other climes' fertility;
> Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced
> With an immaculate charm which can not be defaced."

Through these delightful regions the Pilgrim wanders, awakening by the flashes of his imagination that of the reader, as the face of the country suggests topics of moral interest, and reminds us alternately of the achievements of the great of former days in arms and in literature, and, as local description, mingles itself with the most interesting topics of local history. Arqua, " the mountain where he died," suggests the name of Petrarch; the deserted Ferrara, the fame and the fate of Tasso, fitly classed with Dante and Ariosto, the bards of Hell and Chivalry. Florence, and its statues Thrasimene and Clitumnus, start up before us

with their scenery, and their recollections. Perhaps there are no verses in our language of happier descriptive power than the two stanzas which characterise the latter river. In general, poets find it so difficult to leave an interesting subject, that they injure the distinctness of the description, by loading it so as to embarrass rather than excite the fancy of the reader; or else, to avoid that fault, they confine themselves to cold and abstract generalities. The author has, in the following stanzas, admirably steered his course betwixt these extremes. While they present the outlines of a picture as pure and brilliant as those of Claude Lorraine, the task of filling up the more minute particulars is judiciously left to the imagination of the reader; and it must be dull indeed if it does not supply what the poet has left unsaid, or but generally and briefly intimated. While the eye glances over the lines, we seem to feel the refreshing coolness of the scene—we hear the bubbling tale of the more rapid streams—and see the slender proportions of the rural temple reflected in the crystal depth of the calm pool:—

"But thou, Clitumnus! in thy sweetest wave
Of the most living crystal that was e'er
The haunt of river-nymph, to gaze and lave
Her limbs where nothing hid them, thou dost rear
The grassy bank whereon the milk-white steer
Grazes; the purest god of gentle waters!
And most serene of aspect, and most clear;
Surely that stream was unprofaned by slaughters—
A mirror and a bath for Beauty's youngest daughters!

"And on thy happy shore a temple still,
Of small and delicate proportion, keeps,
Upon a mild declivity of hill,
Its memory of thee; beneath it sweeps
Thy current's calmness; oft from out it leaps

The finny darter with the glittering scales,
Who dwells and revels in thy glassy deeps;
While, chance, some scattered water-lily sails
Down where the shallower wave still tells its bubbling tales."

By mountain and cataract, through this land of existing beauty and heroic memory, the pilgrim at length reaches Rome:—Rome, first Empress of the bodies, then of the souls, of all the civilized world, now owing its political, and, perhaps, even its religious existence to the half contemptuous pity of those nations whom she formerly held in thraldom—Rome is the very ground on which we should have loved to cope with Childe Harold

——"in those sullen fits,
For then he's full of matter."

Nor have we been disappointed in our wishes and expectations; for the voice of Marius could not sound more deep and solemn among the ruined arches of Carthage than the strains of the Pilgrim amid the broken shrines and fallen statues of her subduer. We can but touch partially upon these awful themes. The Palatine is thus described:—

"Cypress and ivy, weed and wallflower grown
Matted and mass'd together, hillocks heap'd
On what were chambers, arch crush'd, column strown
In fragments, chok'd up vaults, and frescos steep'd
In subterranean damps, where the owl peep'd,
Deeming it midnight:—Temples, baths or halls?
Pronounce who can; for all that Learning reap'd
From her research hath been, that these are walls,—
Behold the Imperial Mount! 'tis thus the mighty falls."

And thus the Egerian grottos, with a classical allusion to the complaint of Juvenal, that art in adorning them had destroyed their simplicity, are described in the state of decay by which that simplicity has been restored.

"The mosses of thy fountain still are sprinkled
With thine Elysian water-drops; the face
Of thy cave-guarded spring, with years unwrinkled,
Reflects the meek-eyed genius of the place,
Whose green, wild margin now no more erase
Art's works; nor must the delicate waters sleep,
Prisoned in marble, bubbling from the base
Of the cleft statue, with a gentle leap
The rill runs o'er, and round, fern, flowers, and ivy creep."

The Coliseum is described in the midnight gloom of a cloudless Italian sky; its vast area recalls the bloody games of the Romans, and the poet has vied with the memorable sculptor who produced the Dying Gladiator,—superior in this, that equalling the artist in his faculty of impressing on the fancy the agonies, he can extend his power into incorporeal realms, and body forth not only the convulsed features and stiffened limbs, but the mental feelings and throes of the expiring swordsman.

'I see before me the Gladiator lie:
He leans upon his hand,—his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his drooped head sinks gradually low,—
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now
The arena swims around him—he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won.

"He heard it, but he heeded not,—his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away;
He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother,—he, their sire,
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday,—
All this rush'd with his blood,—shall he expire
And unavenged?—Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!"

The Pantheon, the Mole of Hadrian, St Peter's,

whose vastness expands and "renders colossal" the mind of the gazer, the Vatican, with its treasures of ancient art, are all placed before us with the same picturesque, and rendered real by the same earnest and energetic force of Lord Byron's poetry, in which the numbers seem so little the work of art or study, that they rather appear the natural and unconstrained language in which the thoughts present themselves. The deep-toned melancholy of the poet's mind at length rests on a theme where it must long find a response in every British bosom—on the event which cut down the hope of our nation, sparing neither bush nor blossom, when we most expected to have seen it fulfilled. Liberal as we have been in quotation we cannot resist the opportunity of meeting Lord Byron on a public ground, in which his exquisite strains are an echo to our own thoughts, and where we can join without any of those mental protests which we are too often compelled to make against the correctness of his principles even when admitting the power of his language, and the beauty of his poetry.

> "Hark! forth from the abyss a voice proceeds,
> A long, low, distant murmur of dread sound,
> Such as arises when a nation bleeds
> With some deep and immedicable wound;
> Through storm and darkness yawns the rending ground,
> The gulf is thick with phantoms, but the chief
> Seems royal still, though with her head discrown'd,
> And pale, but lovely, with maternal grief,
> She clasps a babe, to whom her breast yields no relief.
>
> "Scion of chiefs and monarchs, where art thou?
> Fond hope of many nations, art thou dead?
> Could not the grave forget thee, and lay low

Some less majestic, less beloved head?
In the sad midnight, while thy heart still bled,
The mother of a moment, o'er thy boy,
Death hush'd that pang for ever; with thee fled
The present happiness and promised joy
Which filled the imperial isles so full it seemed to cloy.

"Peasants bring forth in safety.—Can it be,
Oh thou that wert so happy, so adored!
Those who weep not for kings shall weep for thee,
And Freedom's heart, grown heavy, cease to hoard
Her many griefs for ONE; for she had pour'd
Her orisons for thee, and o'er thy head
Beheld her Iris.—Thou, too, lonely lord,
And desolate consort—vainly wert thou wed!
The husband of a year—the father of the dead!

"Of sackcloth was thy wedding-garment made;
Thy bridal's fruit is ashes: in the dust
The fair-haired daughter of the isles is laid,
The love of millions!—How we did intrust
Futurity to her! and, though it must
Darken above our bones, yet fondly deem'd
Our children should obey her child, and bless'd
Her and her hoped-for seed, whose promise seem'd
Like stars to shepherd's eyes—'twas but a meteor beam'd."

From the copious specimens which we have given, the reader will be enabled to judge how well the last part of this great poem has sustained Lord Byron's high reputation. Yet we think it possible to trace a marked difference, though none in the tone of thought and expression, betwixt this canto and the first three. There is less of passion, more of deep thought and sentiment, at once collected and general. The stream which in its earlier course bounds over cataracts and rages through narrow and rocky defiles, deepens, expands, and becomes less turbid as it rolls on, losing the aspect of terror and gaining that of sublimity. Eight years have passed between the appearance of the

first volume and the present which concludes the work, a lapse of time which, joined with other circumstances, may have contributed somewhat to moderate the tone of Childe Harold's quarrel with the world, and, if not to reconcile him to his lot, to give him, at least, the firmness which endures it without loud complaint.—To return, however, to the proposition with which we opened our criticism, certain it is, that whether as Harold or as Lord Byron no author has ever fixed upon himself personally so intense a share of the public attention. His descriptions of present and existing scenes, however striking and beautiful, his recurrence to past actions, however important and however powerfully described, become interesting chiefly from the tincture which they receive from the mind of the author. The grot of Egeria, the ruins of the Palatine, are but a theme for his musings, always deep and powerful though sometimes gloomy even to sullenness. This cast of solemnity may not perhaps be justly attributed to the native disposition of the author, which is reported to be as lively as, judging from this single poem at least, we might pronounce it to be grave. But our ideas of happiness are chiefly caught by reflection from the minds of others, and hence it may be observed that those enjoy the most uniform train of good spirits who are thinking much of others and little of themselves. The contemplation of our minds, however salutary for the purposes of self-examination and humiliation, must always be a solemn task, since the best will find enough for remorse, the wisest for regret, the most fortunate for sorrow. And to this influence more than to any natural disposition

to melancholy, to the pain which necessarily follows this anatomizing of his own thoughts and feelings which is so decidedly and peculiarly the characteristic of the Pilgrimage, we are disposed in a great measure to ascribe that sombre tint which pervades the poem. The poetry which treats of the actions and sentiments of others may be grave or gay according to the light in which the author chooses to view his subject, but he who shall mine long and deeply for materials in his own bosom will encounter abysses at the depth of which he must necessarily tremble. This moral truth appears to us to afford, in a great measure, a key to the peculiar tone of Lord Byron. How then, will the reader ask, is our proposition to be reconciled to that which preceded it? If the necessary result of an enquiry into our own thoughts be the conviction that all is vanity and vexation of spirit, why should we object to a style of writing, whatever its consequences may be, which involves in it truths as certain as they are melancholy? If the study of our own enjoyments leads us to doubt the reality of all except the indisputable pleasures of sense, and inclines us therefore towards the Epicurean system,—it is nature, it may be said, and not the poet which urges us upon the fatal conclusion. But this is not so. Nature, when she created man a social being, gave him the capacity of drawing that happiness from his relations with the rest of his race, which he is doomed to seek in vain in his own bosom. These relations cannot be the source of happiness to us if we despise or hate the kind with whom it is their office to unite us more closely

If the earth be a den of fools and knaves, from whom the man of genius differs by the more mercurial and exalted character of his intellect, it is natural that he should look down with pitiless scorn on creatures so inferior. But if, as we believe, each man, in his own degree possesses a portion of the etherial flame, however smothered by unfavourable circumstances, it is or should be enough to secure the most mean from the scorn of genius, as well as from the oppression of power, and such being the case, the relations which we hold with society, through all their gradations, are channels through which the better affections of the loftiest may, without degradation, extend themselves to the lowest.

Farther, it is not only our social connexions which are assigned us, in order to qualify that contempt of mankind, which, too deeply indulged, tends only to intense selfishness; we have other and higher motives for enduring the lot of humanity—sorrow, and pain, and trouble—with patience of our own griefs, and commiseration for those of others. The wisest and the best of all ages have agreed, that our present life is a state of trial, not of enjoyment, and that we now suffer sorrow that we may hereafter be partakers of happiness. If this be true, and it has seldom been long, or at least ultimately, doubted by those who have turned their attention to so serious an investigation, other and worthier motives of action and endurance must necessarily occur to the mind than philosophy can teach, or human pride supply. It is not our intention to do more than merely indicate so ample a

topic for consideration. But we cannot forbear to add, that the vanishing of Lord Byron's Pilgrim strongly reminded us of the close of another work, the delight of our childhood. Childe Harold, a prominent character in the first volume of the Pilgrimage, fades gradually from the scene like the spectre associate, who performed the first stages of his journey with a knight-errant, bearing all the appearance of a living man, but who lessened to the sight by degrees, and became at length totally invisible when they approached the cavern where his mortal remains were deposited.

> " But where is he, the Pilgrim of my song,
> The being who upheld it through the past?
> Methinks he cometh late and tarries long.
> He is no more—these breathings are his last;
> His wanderings done, his visions ebbing fast,
> And he himself as nothing. If he was
> Aught but a phantasy, and could be class'd
> With forms which live and suffer—let that pass—
> His shadow fades away into destruction's mass."

In the corresponding passage of the " Tales of the Genii," Ridley, the amiable author or compiler of the collection, expresses himself to the following purport,—for we have not the book at hand to do justice to his precise words,—" Reader, the Genii are no more, and Horam, but the phantom of my mind, fiction himself and fiction all that he seemed to write, speaks not again. But lament not their loss, since if desirous to see virtue guarded by miracles, Religion can display before you scenes tremendous, wonderful, and great, more worthy of your sight than aught that human fancy can conceive—the moral veil rent in twain and the Sun

of Righteousness arising from the thick clouds of heathen darkness." In the sincere spirit of admiration for Lord Byron's talents, and regard for his character, which has dictated the rest of our criticism, we here close our analysis of Childe Harold.

Our task respecting Lord Byron's poetry is finished, when we have mentioned the subject, quoted passages of superior merit, or which their position renders most capable of being detached from the body of the poem. For the character of his style and versification once distinctly traced (and we have had repeated occasion to consider it), cannot again be dwelt on without repetition. The harmony of verse, and the power of numbers, nay, the selection and arrangement of expressions, are all so subordinate to the thought and sentiment, as to become comparatively light in the scale. His poetry is like the oratory which hurries the hearers along without permitting them to pause on its solecisms or singularities. Its general structure is bold, severe, and as it were Doric, admitting few ornaments but those immediately suggested by the glowing imagination of the author, rising and sinking with the tones of his enthusiasm, roughening into argument, or softening into the melody of feeling and sentiment, as if the language fit for either were alike at the command of the poet, and the numbers not only came uncalled, but arranged themselves with little care on his part into the varied modulation which the subject requires. Many of the stanzas, considered separately from the rest, might be objected to as involved, harsh, and overflowing into each other beyond the usual

license of the Spenserian stanza. But considering the various matter of which the poet had to treat —considering the monotony of a long-continued smoothness of sound, and accurate division of the sense according to the stanzas—considering also that the effect of the general harmony is, as in music, improved by the judicious introduction of discords wherewith it is contrasted, we cannot join with those who state this occasional harshness as an objection to Lord Byron's poetry. If the line sometimes "labours and the words move slow," it is in passages where the sense is correspondent to these laborious movements. A highly finished strain of versification resembles a dressed pleasure ground, elegant—even beautiful—but tame and insipid compared to the majesty and interest of a woodland chase, where scenes of natural loveliness are rendered sweeter and more interesting by the contrast of irregularity and wildness.

We have done with the poem; we have, however, yet a few words to say before we finally close our strictures.

To this canto, as to the former, notes are added, illustrative of the contents; and these, we are informed, are written by Mr Hobhouse, the author of that facetious account of Buonaparte's reign of an hundred days, which it was our office last year to review. They are distinct and classical illustrations of the text, but contain, of course, many political sentiments of a class which have ceased to excite anger, or any feelings stronger than pity, and a sense of the weakness of humanity which, in all ages, has inclined even men of talents and cultiva-

tion to disgrace themselves, by the adoption of sentiments of which it is impossible they can have examined either the grounds or the consequences—whence the doctrines come, or whither they are tending. The mob of a corrupt metropolis, who vindicate the freedom of election by knocking out the brains of the candidate of whom they disapprove, act upon obvious and tangible principles; so do the Spenceans, Spa-fieldians, and Nottingham conspirators. That "seven halfpenny loaves should be sold for a penny,"—that "the three-hooped pot should have ten hoops,"—and that "the realm should be all in common,"—have been the watchwords of insurrection among the vulgar, from Jack Straw's time to the present, and, if neither honest nor praiseworthy, are at least sufficiently plain and intelligible. But the frenzy which makes individuals of birth and education hold a language as if they could be willing to risk the destruction of their native country, and all the horrors of a civil war, is not so easily accounted for. To believe that these persons would accelerate a desolation in which they themselves directly, or through their nearest and dearest connexions, must widely share, merely to remove an obnoxious minister, would be to form a hasty, and perhaps a false judgement of them. The truth seems to be, that the English, even those from whom better things might be expected, are born to be the dupes of jugglers and mountebanks in all professions. It is not only in physic that the names of our nobility and gentry decorate occasionally the list of cures to which the empyric appeals as attesting the force of

his remedy. Religion in the last age, and politics in the present, have had their quacks, who substituted words for sense, and theoretical dogmata for the practice of every duty.—But whether in religion or politics, or physic, one general mark distinguishes the empiric; the patient is to be cured without interruption of business or pleasure,—the proselyte to be saved without reformation of the future, or repentance of the past,—the country to be made happy by an alteration in its political system; and all the vice and misery which luxury and poor's rates, a crowded population, and decayed morality can introduce into the community, to be removed by extending farther political rights to those who daily show that they require to be taught the purpose for which those they already enjoy were intrusted to them. That any one above the rank of an interested demagogue should teach this, is wonderful,—that any should believe it except the lowest of the vulgar, is more so,—but vanity makes as many dupes as folly.

If, however, these gentlemen will needs identify their own cause with that of their country's enemies, we can forgive them as losers, who have proverbial leave to pout. And when, in bitterness of spirit, they term the great, the glorious victory of Waterloo, the "carnage of Saint Jean," we can forgive that too, since, trained in the school of revolutionary France, they must necessarily abhor those

> "whose art was of such power
> It could control their dam's God Setebos,
> And make a vassal of him."—

From the dismal denunciations which Lord Byron,

acting more upon his feeling than his judgment, has made against our country, although

"Were ne'er prophetic sounds so full of wo,"

we entertain no fears—none whatever.—

At home the noble author may hear of better things than "a permanent army and a suspended Habeas Corpus"—he may hear of an improving revenue and increasing public prosperity. And while he continues abroad he may haply call to mind, that the Pilgrim, whom eight years since, the universal domination of France compelled to wander into distant and barbarous countries, is *now* at liberty to travel where he pleases, certain that there is not a corner of the civilized world where his title of Englishman will not ensure him a favourable and respectful reception.

END OF VOLUME SEVENTEENTH.

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